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Chairman: Mr. Hachani ..... (Tunisia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 103: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/53/38/Rev.1, A/53/72–S/1998/156, A/53/87, A/53/95–S/1998/311, A/53/167, A/53/203, A/53/318, A/53/354, A/53/363, A/53/376, A/53/409 and A/53/447)

Agenda item 104: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (*continued*) (A/53/72–S/1998/156, A/53/87, A/53/95–S/1998/311 and A/53/308)

1. **Mr. Ball** (New Zealand) said that several milestones in the pursuit of greater protection for human rights had been attained in the course of the year, the most important of which was the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While progress had been made towards the elimination of gender-based discrimination, that goal was far from being attained because women were not yet fully exercising their fundamental rights despite the international standards and strategies which had been adopted to that end. Over the past 50 years, it had been recognized that women's rights were an integral part of human rights. New Zealand was gratified that the review of the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action had helped ensure that recognition of women's fundamental rights was a priority. The impetus must be sustained because Governments and the United Nations would have to give an account of measures taken to honour the commitments made at the Fourth World Conference on Women. His delegation looked forward to participating in the high-level review in the year 2000, along with non-governmental organizations, to develop strategies for overcoming barriers to the implementation of the Platform for Action. In accordance with the recommendations of the Commission on the Status of Women, New Zealand had taken steps to improve statistics and information on women. A detailed time use survey which was under way would provide information about how women used their time, in particular on unpaid work in their homes and in the community. If women's legal equality was to become a reality, there must be a better understanding of the causes and consequences of women's inequality. In June 1998, New Zealand had presented to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women its combined third and fourth periodic reports describing the steps taken to eliminate discrimination against the women of New Zealand. Issues raised by that Committee regarding unpaid maternity leave had been referred to a parliamentary committee. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had commended the legislation and programmes adopted by New Zealand to combat family violence. The work of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women had made an important contribution to understanding how violence perpetuated inequality. New Zealand also welcomed the establishment of the International Criminal Court and in particular the provisions in its Statute regarding the needs of women and children who had been victims of international crimes.

2. With regard to the implementation of the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women in the Secretariat, the Secretary-General and all components of the United Nations system must take the necessary steps to ensure that the goal of gender equality was achieved at all levels in the Secretariat. His delegation welcomed the close cooperation between the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to ensure that a gender perspective was mainstreamed into all policies and programmes of the United Nations system, and supported the recommendation of the Commission on the Status of Women that gender equality and women's empowerment goals should be integrated into the reform process of the Organization. It supported the efforts made by the Secretary-General and entities within the United Nations system to achieve the strategic objectives identified at Beijing. The work of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality and the activities of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women was very useful.

3. Lastly, New Zealand considered that an optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women would be a significant step in enhancing implementation; it hoped that the text would be completed at the next session of the working group.

4. **Mr. Najem** (Lebanon), recalling that the international community attached particular importance to the empowerment of women in order to ensure gender equality, said that the Fourth World Conference on Women and its preparatory work had served as a catalyst for the advancement of women, the improvement of their status and recognition of their role in development and the need to protect their fundamental rights and freedoms. Lebanon, which had participated actively in the Conference, had established a national follow-up committee, incorporated the question of the equality of women in its laws, and promoted the participation of women in national institutions, in cooperation with regional organizations such as the League of Arab States and United Nations bodies. The continued Israeli occupation in the south and in the Bekaa plain had repercussions on the whole of Lebanon and, in particular, on the situation of women, many of whom had been the

victims of physical and psychological torture inflicted by the Israeli forces. As had been recognized at the Fourth World Conference on Women and in other forums, the presence of foreign armed forces prevented women from enjoying their fundamental rights; all peace-loving countries which were concerned about protecting the rights of women must assist the Lebanese women who were subjected to Israeli occupation.

5. **Ms. Samah** (Algeria) said that the Fourth World Conference on Women represented a high point in women's fight for recognition of their rights and, thanks to the adoption of a comprehensive and coherent Platform for Action, had signalled the commitment of the international community to act together and with determination in order to restore to women the full enjoyment of their rights. Giving women the opportunity to exercise their political, economic and social rights would make amends for the grave injustices which they suffered and would help them gradually to achieve equal status with men. Although it was undeniable that the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action was above all the responsibility of Governments, the United Nations had a role to play and a mandate to fulfil, specifically by ensuring coordination and follow-up of measures for the advancement of women, including within the Secretariat. The high-level meeting held during the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council had led to the formulation of recommendations with a view to reinforcing the framework for action and increasing the mobilization of resources, the inadequacy of which might in the long term jeopardize the success of the planned activities.

6. Having won equal status with men through their efforts during the struggle for national liberation, Algerian women had, in the period following the recovery of national sovereignty, resolved to contribute to the building of a new, democratic and pluralist Algeria. They had therefore become active partners whose interests were duly taken into account in the economic and social policies pursued by the public authorities. In addition to the Constitution, which established the principle of equality between women and men, and the laws governing the various sectors of activity, the authorities had taken measures aimed specifically at women, including the establishment of the National Council for Women, a consultative body concerned with the advancement of women and made up of government representatives and representatives of the women's association movement, the introduction of a revised family code in Parliament and active support for the women's association movement in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. With the right to vote and to run for office, Algerian women participated actively in decision-making concerning the future of their country (indeed, women accounted for more than 50 per cent of eligible voters and were well represented in elected bodies). In the field of education, the authorities had made education for girls a priority, particularly in rural or isolated areas, and had taken a number of measures to make it easier for them to obtain an education.

7. **Ms. Morgan-Moss** (Panama), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group of countries, said that the Heads of State and Government of that group had expressed at all their summits their firm support for the cause of women's rights and equality for women and had recognized that it was important to guarantee special protection for women and girls. The seventh session of the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Santiago (Chile) from 19 to 21 November 1997, had taken stock of the obstacles which hindered participation by women in decision-making and those which were linked to poverty. The Santiago Consensus represented a new step in efforts aimed at ensuring the equality of women in the area of human rights. The leaders' wives, for their part, were supporting the policies for women undertaken in their countries, fully aware that they must meet the same challenges and that only a concerted effort would bring about development in accordance with national priorities.

8. The Rio Group was aware of the excellent contribution made by the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-second session, when it had organized a forum gathering together persons specialized in the areas of action approved in the Beijing Platform for Action. She noted the presentation made by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, for whom the growing importance which her office attached to women's economic and social rights was a means of ensuring women's full integration into and equality within society.

9. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women would celebrate its twentieth anniversary on 18 December 1999. Despite the progress made, however, more effort was necessary, as proved by the work undertaken since 1996 to develop an optional protocol which would place the Convention on the same footing as the major international human rights instruments and help to ensure the protection and effective promotion of women's basic rights. In that context, the Rio Group reaffirmed its commitment to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, in particular article 40 of the Programme, and called for the negotiations on the optional protocol to the Convention to be finalized at the forty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The Rio Group also

called on non-governmental organizations to continue participating in the work of the Commission and reminded the media of their responsibility to provide the public with information which would change stereotypes concerning women by depicting them in such a way as to stress their contribution to society. The Rio Group would spare no effort in meeting women's expectations for equality in the next millennium.

10. With regard to progress made in Panama in the advancement of women, she said that in 1992 a forum on women and development, enabling women of all backgrounds to have an exchange of views, had been held with the participation of non-governmental organizations, civil society and public bodies. A national plan on women and development had then been drawn up and a coordinating body of organizations for the full development of women (CODIM) had been established. In 1995 the National Council for Women and the National Office for Women, sectoral mechanisms represented in most public institutions, had been established. An agreement signed with the European Union in 1996 had led to the creation of a programme for the promotion of equality of opportunity in Panama which would be implemented in the following areas: general interest policy and gender equality; non-discriminatory education; gender issues; empowerment of and participation by the public; action against violence against women and other priorities; and increased awareness within society. The Government had created a Ministry for Youth, Women, Children and the Family which was responsible for the implementation of social policies, the promotion of human development, gender equality and popular participation. Measures for the effective provision of maternal welfare services were envisaged, although in some cases, women entering the workforce were requested to undergo a pregnancy test. Abortion was forbidden, although authorized in cases of rape or if the pregnancy endangered the mother's life. Land was being distributed to indigenous peoples, a process which should help to promote community-based development, benefiting indigenous women in particular.

11. Legal and administrative changes at the national level reflected the Government's efforts to implement the commitments undertaken at the Beijing Conference. There was a real political will to remedy the most visible aspects of discrimination against women in Panama.

12. **Mr. Acemah** (Uganda), having noted that Uganda had signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and was committed to the advancement of women, said that, in common with many African countries, Uganda had a patriarchal society in which tradition and customs played a major part in hindering the advancement of women. The role of Ugandan women had long been limited to performing domestic chores under extremely difficult circumstances so that, to date, women constituted only 20 per cent of the formal employment sector. Over the past decade, however, his Government had adopted policies and programmes aimed at achieving the speedy advancement of women and correcting gender imbalances. To that end, four key areas had been identified: first, a law reform process had been set in motion in 1995 with the promulgation of a new Constitution that provided for temporary affirmative action in favour of women, which had already been implemented in many sectors of the economy. In addition, all other laws that were discriminatory against women, including the Penal Code, were under review. Secondly, in the belief that education was essential for the advancement of women, his Government had taken concrete measures to encourage their enrolment at the university level. As a result, female enrolment had risen to 33 per cent of the total enrolment in universities. In 1997, Uganda had launched a universal primary education programme which had increased the number of female students attending school by 80 per cent and would significantly reduce illiteracy levels among women. Thirdly, his Government believed that the participation of women in the decision-making process was a means of ensuring that decisions at all levels catered for the special interests of women. Hence, at the cabinet level, 12 per cent of ministers were women and the Vice-President of Uganda was a woman, while each of its 45 districts had a woman representative to Parliament. Moreover, women were free to compete for the other parliamentary seats with men, as a result of which the percentage of women members of Parliament had risen to 18.5 per cent. At the local level, they were also entitled to one third of the membership of the executive committees. Fourthly, it was essential to ensure the economic empowerment of women. Since their lower status was due to unequal access to and control over productive resources and benefits, his Government, together with non-governmental organizations, was endeavouring to make credit more available to women with a view to enabling them to participate effectively in the country's economic and social development.

13. Although significant progress had been achieved, much remained to be done. More resources were therefore necessary, as was the eradication of practices that were harmful and degrading to women. Furthermore, due to rebel activities in some parts of the country, women continued to be caught up in situations of armed conflict. His Government was committed to finding a peaceful and lasting resolution

to those conflicts and thus end the suffering of all those affected. Having expressed his gratitude to all the countries, United Nations agencies and non-governmental agencies which had worked with his country, he appealed for further assistance with a view to pursuing the goals set for the advancement of women in Uganda.

14. **Ms. Martinez** (Ecuador) said she fully associated herself with the statement made by the Panamanian representative on behalf of the Rio Group and said that, since 10 August 1998, Ecuador had had a new Constitution which substantially improved the status of women. The State was thus bound, for example, under the provisions of article 23, paragraph 2, of the Constitution to adopt the necessary measures to prevent, eliminate and curb violence in general and against women in particular, while under article 41, it was required to incorporate a gender perspective into all plans and policies. Her Government had also finalized its equal opportunities plan for the period 1996–2000. With regard to education, it had drawn up new programmes aimed at incorporating a gender perspective into teacher training at the Institute of Education and had published training modules on gender issues with a view to eliminating sexual stereotypes and discrimination against women. It was also devising a national plan to reduce maternal mortality and had recently promulgated a law aimed at improving working conditions for women, as well as a law aimed at combating violence against women and within the family.

15. Her delegation welcomed the quality of the reports before the Committee, in particular the report on the status of the Convention against the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/53/318) and the Secretary-General's report on traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women (A/53/354). In that connection, she endorsed the request made by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for States to withdraw their reservations to the Convention. Although the genital mutilation of women was not a traditional practice in Ecuador, her Government nonetheless participated in the efforts to abolish such practices in all the regions concerned. It was also committed to ending the equally deplorable practice of cruel behaviour to which women were traditionally subjected in the home.

16. Ecuador had participated actively in the work of the Open-ended Working Group on the Elaboration of a Draft Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which should make the Convention more effective, and it was ready to pursue negotiations with a view to reaching a consensus. Completion of the elaboration of the Draft Optional Protocol would be an ideal means of marking the twentieth anniversary of the Convention's entry into force.

17. **Ms. De Armas** (Cuba) said that the situation of women at the threshold of the new millennium continued to be very hard owing to serious problems, including poverty, malnutrition and illiteracy, which affected women in particular. Their situation was particularly dramatic in the developing countries, where it was exacerbated by foreign debt, structural adjustment programmes and the consequences of globalization.

18. Access to resources continued to provide the key to attainment of the goal of equality, development and peace for women set by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In the current unipolar world, huge sums of money were destined for the arms race that should instead be allotted to progress, welfare and development. It was therefore essential to establish a new climate of international cooperation that would make it possible to mobilize new resources for health, education, training and other activities directed to the advancement of women.

19. Cuba was pleased that universal ratification of or accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women appeared to be within reach. It supported the open-ended working group to elaborate a draft optional protocol to the Convention as well as efforts by United Nations bodies to include a gender perspective in their work. It was essential, however, that activities for the advancement of women should be financed from the regular budget and receive additional resources.

20. The implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action had given rise to many activities in Cuba. The Council of State had adopted a national plan of action in April 1997 for the follow-up of the Fourth World Conference on Women which had been published in brochure form to make it easier to disseminate to the people. The plan was in addition to the many activities which the Cuban Government conducted in the social sector, amply demonstrating that it was possible to change the status of women if there was the will to do so.

21. Currently, Cuban women were in a fairly enviable situation: they made up 36.8 per cent of the work force, 27.6 per cent of legislators, 41.7 per cent of researchers, 64 per cent of technicians and upper-level managers, 60 per cent of students and 30 per cent of directors in economic, social and political fields. The maternal-mortality rate was only 2.2 per 10,000 live births. But their situation would have been much better if the United States of America had not subjected Cuba to a criminal and unilateral economic, financial and trade embargo and had not adopted extra-

territorial laws which violated its sovereignty and ran counter to international law and the Charter of the United Nations. That embargo had been imposed on Cuba despite the will of the international community, which had once again been expressed by the recent adoption, by 157 votes to 2, of a General Assembly resolution demanding that it should be lifted.

22. Cuba was not unaware that determined efforts must continue in order to reach the goals which the international community had set for itself in Beijing. The establishment of an atmosphere more conducive to cooperation, which was first and foremost the responsibility of the United Nations system, would facilitate the task for States.

23. **Ms. Boyko** (Ukraine) said she shared the views expressed in the Committee that specific measures must be taken to ensure that the basic rights of women were an integral part of human rights, in accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action. The full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women should be given priority in national, regional and international activities. Her delegation welcomed the progress made by the open-ended working group on the elaboration of a draft optional protocol to the Convention, and considered that the work could be carried out within existing resources. Moreover, better cooperation was needed between the respective international bodies, in particular those in the United Nations system, and the regional structures.

24. Ukraine attached special importance to the practical implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and was about to complete the setting up of a national mechanism to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women. It was making efforts to implement its National Plan of Action for the period 1997–2000, aimed at improving the situation of women and upgrading their role in society. Equal rights for men and women were guaranteed by the Constitution of Ukraine and other relevant legal instruments, including the codes on marriage and the family, employment and criminal procedure. Ukrainian legislation was in conformity with the convention. More and more women were participating in political life and in the activities of some 70 women's organizations in the country. At the same time, the status of women was influenced by various negative factors. The major problems, mainly caused by socio-economic difficulties, were a decline in the quality of health care, a falling birth rate, an increase in infant mortality and the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster. The current birth rate did not even provide for the replacement of the population. Nevertheless, her delegation was grateful to the international community and the relevant organizations, particularly the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for assistance in minimizing the consequences of Chernobyl.

25. Ukraine was deeply concerned by the problem of trafficking in women and children, which affected all the countries of Eastern Europe. It was important to improve cooperation and the exchange of information at the bilateral, subregional, regional and international levels and to set up a database in collaboration with Interpol and other relevant agencies. In April 1998 the President of Ukraine had signed a law on criminal responsibility for trafficking in persons which stipulated the punishment for persons involved in any way with such trafficking. A programme for the prevention of trafficking in women, conducted by non-governmental organizations within the framework of the FARE and TACIS programmes, had also been launched. Her delegation also welcomed the efforts of the International Organization for Migration, with the support of the United States and the European Union, in launching a broad information campaign aimed at drawing the attention of young women and girls to the dangers of trafficking in women.

26. **Ms. Ramírez** (Argentina) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement of Panama on behalf of the Rio Group, and with the statement of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China made at the previous meeting. If there was one area where women had made progress, it was undoubtedly their participation in political life. In every country of the world, women of all social classes were active participants in public life. There should be no illusions about that progress, however; the basic rights of many women, to education and medical care in particular, were ignored simply because they were women.

27. Her delegation welcomed the reports of the Secretary-General on the status of women, which, *inter alia*, stressed the need for education, and on trafficking in women and girls. It supported in particular his recommendation to strengthen measures to combat trafficking and to provide assistance to its victims.

28. Since the beginning of the 1990s, there had been a great number of activities for the advancement of women in Argentina. A National Council of Women had been established to oversee the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and in 1991 a law establishing electoral quotas for women had been passed. In March 1998, on the occasion of International Women's Day, the President of Argentina had launched a programme to combat discrimination against women aimed at providing equal employment opportunities and equal rights to vocational training. Also in 1998, the Government had launched the Federal Plan for Women to

strengthen national, provincial and municipal institutions for the advancement of women, and a national women's information system was currently in place. The Argentine Institute for Statistics and the Census would participate in those activities by developing gender-disaggregated indicators in all economic and social fields.

29. Her delegation hoped that the working group on the elaboration of a draft optional protocol to the Convention would be able to complete its work quickly, so that the protocol could enter into force in the year 2000. She also hoped for a successful outcome of the work of the Commission on the Status of Women in preparation for the special session of the General Assembly to be held in June 2000.

30. **Ms. Kimliková** (Slovakia) expressed appreciation for the fact that the Commission on Human Rights, at its fifty-fourth session, had held a special meeting on the status of women, and that it had placed the question of the fundamental rights of women and gender perspective on the agenda for its fifty-fifth session. She noted with satisfaction that the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on the Status of Women were working more closely together, and that the issue of gender balance had been mainstreamed within the United Nations system. Slovakia, as a State Party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women since 1993, had submitted its initial report under the Convention, and that report had been considered by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in June 1998.

31. In accordance with the relevant international conventions, Slovak law contained no provisions that were discriminatory towards women. All citizens of Slovakia, both men and women, enjoyed the same rights, which were guaranteed by the Constitution. Slovak women regarded themselves as fully emancipated, a fact that was confirmed by data published in the 1998 *Human Development Report*, which indicated that Slovakia was one of the 24 countries in the world were women controlled at least 41 per cent of family income. Her delegation acknowledged, however, that prejudices relating to the traditional view of the role of women in society had not completely disappeared, either in Slovakia or elsewhere in the world. As evidence, it was only necessary to consider women's participation in decision-making, especially in the political arena.

32. With respect to the implementation of the recommendations of the Beijing Conference, in 1996 Slovakia had established a Coordination Committee on women's issues consisting of members representing Parliament, governmental bodies, churches, women's non-governmental organizations, research institutions, the armed forces and the private sector. The Committee had prepared a national plan of action for women during the coming decade, and that plan would constitute the key policy document underpinning the advancement of Slovak women. Lastly, her delegation welcomed the adoption of General Assembly resolution 52/100, by which the General Assembly had decided to convene, in the year 2000, a high-level plenary review to appraise and assess the progress achieved in the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and the Platform for Action, and to consider further actions and initiatives.

33. **Ms. Al-Hamami** (Yemen) said that her country, as a pluralistic democratic State, was committed to equality between men and women, which was guaranteed by the Constitution and the law. In point of fact, Yemeni law contained virtually no provisions that were discriminatory towards women. In practice, however, it would be appropriate to promote participation by women and encourage their access to education, so that they could achieve equality with men in all fields and at all levels. Such equality was a long-term objective that would require support from the country's authorities and would have to be accompanied by real political will. Currently, the various economic sectors were accessible to women. Furthermore, in a development that would have been inconceivable only a few years earlier, women held senior positions in the country's judiciary; there were 32 women judges and 35 women lawyers in Yemen, and there were 102 women diplomats. Participation by women in the parliamentary elections held in 1997 had unquestionably been a major event, providing them with an opportunity of showing what a vital role they could play in Yemeni society. Yemen, which had the utmost regard for the principle of equality between men and women, had taken part in many international conferences on the issue and had become a party to the relevant conventions.

34. Despite the Government's efforts, Yemeni women still did not have full access to education, health services and employment. They were at greater risk of illiteracy and poverty, and consequently were frequently not in a position to understand their rights. For that reason, in accordance with the recommendations of the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Government of Yemen, acting on a decision of the Council of Ministers, had instituted a national commission for women in 1996. That commission would be entrusted with preparing action plans and strategies aimed at improving the status of women in both rural and urban areas. In addition, a national women's conference had been held in March 1997, at which the groundwork for a national

strategy for women had been laid and a plan for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action had been formulated. Non-governmental organizations and the private sector had joined in Government-led efforts by participating in various programmes and seminars aimed at the advancement of women.

35. At the international level, Yemen was participating in the work of the various relevant organizations, including the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and UNESCO. It was also receiving assistance from the European Union and such countries as Germany and the Netherlands for the implementation of projects designed to benefit Yemeni women. Emphasizing the efforts of the United Nations over the past four decades to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, she said that it was time to strive for concrete results. She called upon the international community to redouble its efforts and to cooperate more closely in order to attain the objective of equality between the sexes, in accordance with the principles set forth in the various relevant instruments.

36. **Ms. Camara** (Côte d'Ivoire) said she wondered whether it would be feasible, given the stagnant condition of the international economic environment, fully to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The recommendations of the Beijing Conference fell into two categories: those requiring a favourable economic environment for their implementation, and those requiring political mobilization. Where growth was inadequate and there were not enough resources available for such sectors as health and education, women tended to be more severely affected; they were also more vulnerable to the risk of poverty. However, the issue of the advancement of women involved not only resources but also political will on the part of Governments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector.

37. Her delegation noted with satisfaction that to date some 162 States had become parties to the Convention, and considered that ratification or accession by all States by the year 2000 was a feasible objective. Concerning follow-up to the Beijing Conference, the Government of Côte d'Ivoire had updated its statistical data on women. A study had been conducted, with the assistance of the United Nations Population Fund, to assess the status of the country's women, a necessary task in the absence of data broken down by sex, and to prepare a national plan of action. The study had focused on four major points: the concept of gender perspective, the identification of strategies and actions deserving priority, participation by women, and the integration of national strategies.

38. Without waiting for the completed national plan of action, Côte d'Ivoire had already taken follow-up action to implement the recommendations of the Beijing Conference. Two bills were before the National Assembly, one that would prohibit genital mutilation and violence against women, and the other dealing with sexual harassment in schools. Steps had been taken with a view to encouraging school enrolment and literacy for women, alleviating poverty, encouraging women to start their own businesses, and making it easier for them to rise to senior positions in the diplomatic service, the armed forces, the administration, the police and the judiciary. Furthermore, numerous non-governmental organizations had undertaken a variety of activities in the fields of health, education and agriculture that were aimed at enhancing the status of Ivorian women.

39. **Ms. Mdoe** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made at the previous meeting by the representative of Indonesia, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and the statement made by Malawi on behalf of the member States of the Southern African Development Community. The United Republic of Tanzania, which was firmly convinced that its greatest asset was its people, and wished to ensure the equal status of women stipulated in its Constitution, had participated actively in the work of the Fourth World Conference on Women. It had then drawn up a national plan of action aimed at promoting the legal and economic empowerment of women and improving their access to social services, including health, education, training and employment.

40. In that context the Tanzanian parliament, on the recommendation of her Government, had passed legislation stipulating that at least 15 per cent of the members of parliament must be women, and at least 25 per cent of the seats at the local government level should be reserved for women. Furthermore, her Government, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, had made efforts to sensitize the public and members of parliament to the universal nature of fundamental rights and, in 1996, had adopted a community development policy which provided for the implementation of a programme for the advancement of women incorporating the commitments made at the Fourth World Conference on Women.

41. With regard to violence against women, on 1 July 1998 the Tanzanian parliament had adopted an act which imposed a life sentence on anyone convicted of sexual abuse; other stringent laws had been adopted, such as an act which made female genital mutilation a criminal offence. Her

Government realized that those measures in and of themselves were not enough to resolve the problem of violence against women but believed that their strict implementation would help significantly improve the situation.

42. If the commitments made in Beijing were to be fully realized, Governments must have the will to adopt the necessary policies and introduce new legislation and needed to have access to sufficient resources. In terms of political will, her Government had already demonstrated that it would not be found wanting. It had not only had the text of the Convention translated into Kiswahili but was also striving to integrate a gender perspective into all its policies. In terms of resources, the situation was considerably less encouraging, since the United Republic of Tanzania was constrained by immense economic difficulties. The enormous burden of external debt servicing, coupled with the structural adjustment programmes prescribed by international financial and monetary institutions, were preventing it from investing in such fundamental areas as education, nutrition, health care, water supply and sanitation, less still promoting the advancement of women.

43. In order to enable the Governments of developing countries to live up to the commitments made in Beijing, the international community must take concrete measures to alleviate their economic problems. In particular, it should review the problem of external debt so that the 20/20 compact for human development agreed to at the World Summit for Social Development would be respected. To the same end, it should increase the levels of official development assistance envisaged at that conference and other major international conferences. The United Republic of Tanzania was pleased to note in the report of the Secretary-General on the status of the Convention (A/53/318) that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had refined its method of preparing lists of questions on periodic reports, thereby enabling States parties to the Convention to submit more comprehensive and objective reports.

44. **Mr. Garcia Gonzalez** (El Salvador), stressing the major role played by the Convention in promoting the advancement of women, said that the Convention and the measures taken at the global level had led El Salvador to modify its legislation and institutions and adopt a family code aimed at ensuring respect for gender equality, the elimination of discrimination against women, and the protection of young people, the disabled and older persons. A national institute for the development of women had been established and entrusted with formulating national policy with regard to women, promoting their status and ensuring gender equality. Among its initiatives, it had established progress banks and microenterprises and drawn up family welfare programmes. The banks had allocated loans to 13,500 women to help them ensure the subsistence of their families, and the family welfare programmes had assisted 30,000 women victims of domestic violence through the "red telephone" system.

45. At the regional level, the seventh regional conference on the integration of women, held in Santiago in November 1997, had led to the adoption of the Santiago consensus which set forth the obstacles encountered by the women of Latin America and the Caribbean in respect of participation in political life and decision-making and the difficulties they encountered in general. With regard to traffic in women and girls for the purposes of prostitution, steps had been taken at the national and municipal levels to combat the causes, and police raids to expose and close brothels had been stepped up. Amendments had also been made to national legislation and municipal decrees. El Salvador was sponsoring resolutions on the question in various United Nations bodies. It was also supporting the concerted efforts that were being made at the international and national levels with the assistance of non-governmental organizations and civil society to organize awareness campaigns on the problem.

46. **Mr. Powell** (World Food Programme (WFP)) said that although the right to food was a human right, one person in five was going hungry, or over 800 million people in the world. Since women had the main responsibility for the food security of families, resources that were allocated to them benefited children much more than resources allocated to men. In order to ensure an equal place for women in society, their role in that sphere must be recognized. By reducing inequalities in the allocation of resources, the prosperity of families and of communities in general could be enhanced.

47. The World Food Programme distributed tons of food every year and helped assist the most vulnerable groups enjoy the fundamental right to food. For lack of adequate resources, it had adopted policies and strategies aimed, in particular, at assisting the most disadvantaged populations. Resolving the problem of hunger should be one of the major priorities of the international community. Following the Fourth World Conference on Women, WFP had established a programme with the objective of reducing the inequalities hindering the participation of women in all areas of national life by facilitating their access to education and training.

48. In many countries, conflicts were preventing populations from securing food. According to statistics, three in four victims of wars, drought and natural disasters

were women and girls, and that must be taken into account in distributing emergency food aid. The ultimate objective of WFP was to assist the largest possible number of people in meeting their food needs. To that end, donors must target their objectives more accurately. The approach followed by WFP was currently needs-based. By promoting the increased participation of women in food distribution it should be possible to adopt a rights-based approach, in which the beneficiaries would be directly involved. WFP believed that women should assume responsibilities and exercise control over the distribution of food supplies.

49. **Mr. Paiva** (International Organization for Migration (IOM)), referring to trafficking in women and girls, said that the expansion of that hugely lucrative business exposed migrants to abuse and exploitation. Trafficking in women and girls was therefore simultaneously a migration issue, a criminal issue and a gender issue that was a part of the larger migration picture. The reasons that drove migration, such as poverty, lack of employment opportunities, scarce national resources and political and economic instability were, in fact, at the root of the problem of trafficking. Trafficking in women, furthermore, was linked to organized crime and lax or corrupt law enforcement. The gap between the demand for foreign labour and the diminishing legal channels of migration in most countries provided the opening which organized crime had been quick to exploit. Trafficking in women and girls violated their basic human rights. By way of combating trafficking in migrants, IOM was serving as an intermediary for the sharing of information and experience, conducting policy-relevant research, assisting Governments to strengthen their capacity to deal with such trafficking, and carrying out programmes to assist the victims. Over the previous four years, IOM had sponsored more than a dozen global or regional meetings on migrant trafficking in various parts of the world, most recently in Ukraine in July 1998. Documentation on the activities at that meeting was available on the Internet. IOM had also recently furnished the European Union with an analysis of data and statistical resources available in European Union member States on trafficking in humans and particularly women and children. The IOM programmes for building country capacity to manage migration included harmonization of migration legislation, training in the detection of trafficking and fraud and in entry and exit control. Its programmes also advocated measures such as effectively criminalizing the actions of traffickers, dealing more humanely with the victims, authorizing them to remain in a country on humanitarian grounds, and ensuring witness protection and assistance in returning to their countries. More would have to be done to publicize the actual experience of countries, in order to share best practices and improve the treatment accorded to trafficked women and girls.

50. As important as those measures were, they would in many cases come too late for the victims of trafficking. It was particularly urgent to deal with the traumatic consequences of the experience they had lived through. IOM had therefore also organized the return and reintegration of migrant women who had been subject to abuse. A pilot project under way in South East Asia had helped over 300 women and children to return from Thailand to their home countries where they were helped with reintegration. IOM was also arranging voluntary return in other regions, notably Central America and the Baltic region. To deal with the growing challenge of trafficking in women and girls, Governments, international agencies and non-governmental organizations from sending, transit and receiving countries must work hand in hand.

51. **Ms. Pavlic** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that UNESCO continued to give priority to questions involving gender equality in all fields within its competence, namely, education, science, culture and communication. The eradication of poverty and the establishment of a culture of peace being its two overriding objectives, UNESCO devoted much of its attention to the empowerment of women because they were the primary victims of poverty and violence.

52. Gender mainstreaming was high on the UNESCO agenda and its secretariat had introduced gender-specific budget codes and gender-sensitization for its staff, and was endeavouring to increase its recruitment and promotion of women to higher Professional and management posts, and to apply a system of accountability, especially at the higher management level. Concomitantly, UNESCO also had to assist the majority of its member States to make gender mainstreaming a reality. The recently held UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education had shown that in spite of the secretariat's efforts to integrate the gender component into all aspects of the Conference, the role of women in higher education and in development had remained a separate issue and its debate had been attended mostly by women. Despite the Director-General's explicit appeal to Governments to increase the percentage of women in their delegations to 50 per cent or even 30 per cent, women had in fact constituted only 20 per cent. That underlined the pertinence of the terms of the declaration adopted by the Conference. The UNESCO World Conference on Science that was to be held in Budapest in June 1999 was being organized in conjunction with UNIFEM and major non-governmental organizations. Preparatory regional meetings

would take place in Argentina, Australia, Burkina Faso, Italy and Slovenia in the coming months.

53. In connection with the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UNESCO was widely publicizing the text of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which had been printed in the format of a wallet-sized *Passport to Equality* in English, Spanish, French and Portuguese (that last, thanks to the UNESCO office in Rio and to the Brazilian authorities). The *Passport* was being publicized by non-governmental organizations, such as the International Federation of Women in Legal Professions, which was also undertaking a worldwide study of the Convention, in particular of article 10 on education. The *Passport* was going to be printed in Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Russian, Swahili and Urdu, with the help of United Nations agencies, Governments and private foundations.

54. As part of the commemorations, two other initiatives had been taken. A scholarship fund for poor rural African girls had been set up by UNESCO — FAWE (Forum of African Women Educationalists) to enable them to pursue secondary, technical and vocational studies. The second initiative was the publication of a third, improved and updated edition in English and French of the *UNESCO Guide to Non-sexist Language*, to be distributed during the UNESCO international conference on human rights to be held in Paris from 7 to 9 December 1998.

55. Regarding the implementation of the Fourth World Conference on Women, UNESCO continued to promote literacy and basic education, including adult education, as a fundamental prerequisite for the empowerment of women. Its efforts were increasingly being linked to those of other United Nations agencies to enable poor women to have access to credit. Emphasis was also placed on facilitating the access of women to relevant political and economic information through ambitious initiatives such as a project being executed by the Netherlands. The promotion of the role of women in developing a culture of peace assumed their access to information of crucial importance to peace efforts and the exchange of that information among women within countries and across borders. Steps in that direction were being planned with major women's networks in Africa.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.

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Chairman: Ms. Sandru (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Romania)

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* Items which the Committee has decided to consider together.

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98-81651 (E)

In the absence of Mr. Hachani (Tunisia), Ms. Sandru (Romania), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 103: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/53/38/Rev.1, A/53/72-S/1998/156, A/53/87, A/53/95-S/1998/311, A/53/167, 203, 318, 354, 363, 376, 409 and 447)

Agenda item 104: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (*continued*) (A/53/72-S/1998/156, A/53/87, A/53/95-S/1998/311 and A/53/308)

1. **Mrs. Farhadi** (Afghanistan) said that the situation of women in her country was extremely serious. Paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 52/145 urged all the Afghan parties to bring an end to discrimination on the basis of gender and to the deprivation of human rights of women without delay. Over the past year, the Taliban mercenaries had done everything to prevent the participation of women in the civil, cultural, educational, economic, political and social life of the regions under their military occupation. That policy, which had been applied since 1995, was continually being reinforced.

2. Women were deprived of the right to work in all the regions under occupation, and restrictions on their movements had been further tightened. The situation with regard to the right of women and girls to education had further deteriorated. The prohibition preventing girls from studying would continue as long as the Taliban military occupation lasted. Paragraph 6 of resolution 52/145 also referred to measures to ensure respect for the right of women to work and their reintegration in employment. The situation with regard to the protection of women's health and their access to health-care facilities was becoming catastrophic.

3. Resolution 1998/17 of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities took note of the numerous reports dealing with the unprecedented and extremely difficult situation of women in Kabul and the other parts of Afghanistan controlled by the Taliban, expressed its deep concern at the continuous suffering of Afghan women under the prohibitions placed upon them by the Taliban, and considered that the current policies of the Taliban with regard to the female population of the territories under their control constituted a flagrant violation of the principles of Islam and international law.

4. Islam recognized equality between men and women, and women were increasingly participating in the social progress of many Muslim countries. It was very regrettable, therefore, that in a number of Afghan cities under military occupation the education of girls and all participation by women in public life were being prevented. In the provinces that were not under military occupation by the Taliban, girls had the full right to continue their studies in public schools financed by the Islamic State of Afghanistan. Her delegation recommended that the provisions of resolution 1998/17 concerning the rights of women should be included in the draft resolution on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan to be submitted to the plenary Assembly at the current session.

5. **Mr. Ka** (Senegal) said that all Governments and United Nations bodies should promote equality between the sexes in their activities. At its forty-second session, the Commission on the Status of Women had organized a series of round tables on critical areas in that regard, including that of women and armed conflicts. It was necessary to ensure the safety of displaced and refugee women and increase the participation of women in preventive diplomacy, in peacekeeping and in the restoration and consolidation of peace after conflicts were resolved.

6. Peace was an essential condition for development in Africa. No policy to promote human rights, including the rights of women, could be successful in conditions of war and armed confrontation. His Government attached great importance to the advancement of women, the follow-up to the Beijing Conference and good preparations for the high-level plenary review to appraise the progress achieved in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Senegal had set up various mechanisms to promote the advancement of women. The Ministry of Women, Social Action and National Solidarity was the focal point for national policy in that field. Activities were decentralized, participative and conducted in partnership with non-governmental organizations and women's movements.

7. The Action Plan for Women, adopted in 1996, aimed at combating poverty among women, raising the educational level of women and girls, improving the state of their health, increasing their participation in political life and strengthening mechanisms for promoting and financing women's activities. Those objectives were part of his country's follow-up to the Beijing Conference.

8. New initiatives must be taken to achieve overall equality between the sexes within the United Nations system, and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) should be strengthened.

9. Measures to combat trafficking in women and girls must be stepped up, and everything should be done to halt traditional practices affecting the health of women and girls, such as female genital mutilation. In intensifying its campaign against such practices and against all forms of violence against women, the Senegalese Government would shortly submit a bill to the National Assembly further penalizing such acts.

10. He hoped that the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women would be completed before the plenary review to appraise the progress made in the implementation of the Platform for Action.

11. **Ms. Al-Awadhi** (Kuwait) said that the situation of Kuwaiti women had evolved very rapidly thanks to a social and economic development plan and work programme, elaborated by her Government, in which women's situation had been addressed from the human development perspective. The principal aim was to provide women with the same educational and training opportunities as men and to facilitate the integration of women students, particularly from university and vocational-training institutions, into the labour market.

12. The principle of equality between men and women was enshrined in the Constitution of Kuwait, which guaranteed women the right to education and employment, to freely choose the nature of their work and to engage in commercial and professional activities. Women currently accounted for a third of Kuwait's workforce and were increasingly aware of their important role in social and economic development.

13. Women were gaining access to positions of power and authority in Kuwait; they already occupied a number of important posts in administration, academia, diplomacy and social affairs. However, the contribution of Kuwaiti women to society was not limited to paid employment, but included work in the charity, cultural, social, artistic and vocational fields.

14. The women of Kuwait continued to suffer from social and psychological problems resulting from the Iraqi occupation. Some women had been widowed, while others were tortured by the uncertainty surrounding the fate of their husbands, who had been taken prisoner by the Iraqi authorities. Moreover, Kuwaiti children exhibited symptoms of anxiety and fear as a result of having witnessed the brutality with which their fathers had been taken from them. The burden of that tragedy was exacerbated by Iraq's continuing refusal to offer any information about Kuwaiti prisoners and hostages, as had been made clear in a series of meetings between Iraq and representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

15. **Mrs. Nicodemos** (Brazil) said that her country attached great importance to the advancement of women and the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women. She noted with satisfaction that enormous progress had been made in the past few decades as a result of persistent and combined efforts at the international, regional and national levels. The United Nations had played a crucial role in integrating women into political, social and economic life, raising awareness about women's rights and incorporating a gender perspective into all areas of human activity.

16. In Brazil, the open dialogue between civil society and the Government had given renewed impetus to the women's movement. "Strategies for Equality", the national plan of action to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, consisted of a set of public policies as well as initiatives by civil society aimed at eliminating gender discrimination and promoting full citizenship for women. Women's participation in political life was perceived in Brazil as a key element for achieving gender equality and introducing a gender perspective into all Government activities. Her Government had recently drawn up a national programme for the promotion of equal opportunities in the public service, which constituted a model for society as a whole.

17. Her delegation fully supported the decisions taken by the General Assembly and the Commission on the Status of Women concerning the high-level plenary review to appraise and assess progress achieved in the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and the Beijing Platform for Action. The objective should be to reaffirm the commitment to the Beijing Platform and focus on strategies to eliminate obstacles to its implementation.

18. **Mrs. Gaspard** (France) said that her delegation fully supported the statement made on the previous day by the European Union, which demonstrated, *inter alia*, the role played by community action programmes in ensuring equality of opportunity for women and men. France had been celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights through a series of regional activities which would culminate in several weeks in the holding of a major international seminar at the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

19. Since its establishment, the United Nations had played a fundamental role in efforts to eliminate discrimination against women. At the forty-second session of the

Commission on the Status of Women, the High Commissioner for Human Rights had stressed that women's rights were an integral part of human rights. Unfortunately, gender inequality continued to exist throughout the world, even in countries whose legislation proclaimed equality in the civil and social spheres. No so-called cultural reasons could be used to force women into isolation, legitimize harmful traditional practices or restrict the access of women to health care, credit and equal pay. Nevertheless, no country in the world, even the most advanced, had achieved a perfectly satisfactory situation with regard to equality of the sexes.

20. Her delegation commended the work carried out by Ms. Angela King, the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. Current data indicated that it could be possible to achieve gender equality in the Secretariat by the year 2002 or at the latest by 2006, which demonstrated the effectiveness of the policy pursued.

21. In France, the Council of Ministers had adopted a draft revision of the Constitution, soon to go to the Parliament, that would make it possible to pass laws promoting equal access for women and men to elected office and to posts in the administration. Although 30 per cent of government officials were women, there were still too few in elected assemblies. Also, France had invited the European Union to meet in Paris in spring 1999 for a major conference on women in political, economic, social and cultural decision-making at which participants would look at the strategies being implemented in each country in application of the recommendation adopted by the European Union Council of Ministers following the Beijing Conference; the major objective of the recommendation was balance between women and men in decision-making.

22. The achievement of freedom of choice in bearing children, thanks to an effective family planning system, access to contraception and the possibility of voluntary termination of pregnancies had been a major turning point for women's rights in France; at the same time, France had one of the highest birth rates in Europe, owing to its strong family policy and well-developed public service for looking after young children. Another major change had been that for over a quarter of a century more girls than boys had gone on to higher education, and for 20 years more and more women had entered the labour market despite the economic crisis.

23. Her delegation particularly welcomed the agreed conclusions concerning violence against women adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women at its latest session, but emphasized that all forms of prostitution must be condemned and combated. For the next session of the Commission, her delegation looked forward to the adoption of the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on the right to petition.

24. Gender mainstreaming was a major long-term objective; in that task, a strong and determined administration had a role to play, as shown by the work of the Secretariat.

25. She supported the view expressed by a previous speaker that the 1991 high-level expert report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development on the role of women in development was still worthy of the Committee's attention, as it showed those who were not yet convinced that equality was perhaps a necessary condition for growth and for transforming modes of governance.

26. **Ms. Noda-Núñez** (Guatemala) explained that half of the women of Guatemala were of Maya, Xinca and Garifuna descent. Sixty per cent of the women lived in rural areas and 45 per cent were under 15. While the illiteracy rate in Guatemala was about one third, it could be as high as 90 per cent for indigenous women in rural areas. Most Guatemalan women were below the poverty level, which hindered their involvement in development. Also, despite a legal framework favourable towards improving women's status, discrimination and inequity persist[ed] in male-female relations, and opportunities for women to participate were fewer, as reflected in low levels of self-esteem.

27. Although that reality was hard, improving the status of women along the lines of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Beijing Platform for Action had been the guiding theme of the Government's policies. Considerable progress had been made: full respect for human rights – women's as well as men's – and the mainstreaming of women in development were priorities for the Government, and the process of involving women fully in the life of the country at all levels was well under way.

28. All sectors in the country had responsibly played their allotted roles under the peace agreements between the Government and the Unidad Nacional Revolucionaria Guatemalteca (URNG), and among their commitments were some along the lines of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action.

29. The importance of women's role in the current stage of consolidating peace in Guatemala, begun in December 1996, had been proven time and again: as many major United Nations texts indicated, peace was linked to

improving the status of women because women were a fundamental force in community leadership and more so within families. In Guatemala, which was multilingual, multiethnic and multicultural, the function of women as guardians of the culture that defined each population group, and as vehicles for transmitting that culture, was of fundamental importance.

30. On the institutional level, there had been definite progress in improving women's status through the establishment of the National Women's Forum and the activities of the National Office of Women, which were aimed at the full inclusion of women in national development. Also, the Ministry of Planning, through its national equality plan, was working to ensure defence of women's rights and also women's equal participation in the economic, social, cultural and political fields.

31. The number of women in senior decision-making posts had been significantly increased: various posts of minister or deputy minister were held by women; there were women members of Congress, officials in the political parties and Supreme Court judges. Indigenous women were participating more, and had taken up leadership positions in social and political forums.

32. Full participation by women would take time, however: various institutional and social mechanisms militated against women, and women's participation in economic affairs and decision-making still needed strengthening. An initiative had been laid before Congress to expand women's participation in management and in elected posts and include them more in political life. If the initiative succeeded, lists of candidates for elected posts would have to include at least 30 per cent women.

33. The poverty of many women, especially indigenous women in rural areas or as heads of family in marginal urban areas, had moved the Government and many non-governmental organizations to design poverty eradication programmes; as a result, new opportunities were opening up for women, with lines of credit for companies controlled by women or for family microbusinesses.

34. In the labour market, participation by women in income-generating activities was rising, although it was concentrated in areas that did not require high levels of skill. Assessments of women's work were clearly too low, with no measurement made of the contribution to the national economy of women's work in the home. Guatemala therefore welcomed the decision by the Economic and Social Council to pay special attention to the feminization of poverty, and to have poverty eradication on its agenda for 1999.

35. An educational reform project had recently been finalized; it recognized the respective roles of the parents, the family, and the school. Activities under the project would without a doubt synergize the establishment in Guatemala of a culture of tolerance and respect for difference while aiming to achieve respect for the rights of all people and all peoples.

36. Although eradicating violence against women remained a major challenge in Guatemala, the Family Violence Act provided a framework for achieving that goal.

37. Since the signing of the peace agreements, every factor in the power balance had suffered some degree of change. However, the changes were still vulnerable: the time had been too short to achieve radical changes, particularly as the causes of Guatemalan society's ills — and the ills affecting Guatemalan women — were centuries old. They could not be eradicated overnight, but the way ahead was open and Guatemala would continue making all the efforts needed to improve women's status in all areas of the country's life.

38. **Mr. Arda** (Turkey) said that Turkey had endorsed the Beijing Platform for Action without reservation and had prepared its national plan of action with contributions from women's non-governmental organizations; it had submitted its second and third periodic reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and in the light of CEDAW's recommendations was adopting measures to improve the status of women further. It was also considering lifting its reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and was working on a series of new laws, from the civil code to the social-security regulations, to change current provisions considered discriminatory against women. In January 1998 it had adopted an act making domestic violence a crime.

39. Turkish women were conscious of their rights, which Turkey's secular system guaranteed would be achieved relatively quickly with continuous improvements in women's status and with no need for affirmative action. Promoting women's rights was one of the greatest achievements of the United Nations, and he contrasted the current situation, where women's rights were seen as human rights, with that of a generation before. Governments were trying to achieve gender mainstreaming in their programmes and policies, and while some countries were moving faster than others, all countries were moving in the same direction. Consequently, it was a pity that the Organization itself was in need of some affirmative action.

40. The Turkish Government strongly supported the call by the Commission on the Status of Women for the

eradication of traditional practices harmful to women and their human rights, but was concerned that certain practices, such as forced marriage, that caused the sufferings of millions of women might thereby be overlooked. He called on INSTRAW, UNIFEM and the Division for the Advancement of Women to fill the breach by providing more comprehensive data on traditional practices that adversely affected women.

41. Turkey welcomed the interaction between the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Human Rights because it reaffirmed women's rights as human rights and should therefore be strengthened.

42. Turkey believed that it was an inherent right for women and girls to have access to confidential and affordable health services, including sexual and reproductive health. It therefore welcomed the fact that the Commission on the Status of Women would have on the agenda for its forthcoming session items relating to women and health and to institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, and would thus complete its review of the critical areas identified in the Platform for Action. In that connection, Turkey took the view that implementation of the Platform for Action by Governments was a political issue that required high-level commitment and sufficient resources if it was to succeed.

43. Turkey welcomed the decision by CEDAW to ban participation of members of the Committee from taking part in considering reports from countries of which they were nationals, since the independence of members in such deliberations was vital. However, the ban should not prevent the Committee from using such members as resource people.

44. Turkey welcomed the inclusion of sexual crimes, including rape and enforced pregnancy, in the scope of the International Criminal Court as war crimes and crimes against humanity.

45. Turkey, which had participated in the working group concerned, hoped that the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on the right to petition would soon be completed.

46. **Mr. Suh Dae-Won** (Republic of Korea) said that, while many countries had integrated gender equity into their national action plans, full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action had been hindered by lack of political will, financial difficulties and other obstacles. Political leaders should renew their commitments, and civil society should continue its close involvement.

47. His delegation supported all efforts to mainstream the gender perspective in the programmes and activities of the United Nations and looked forward to greater efficiency and synergy among the relevant organizations. More attention should be given to collecting gender-specific data, in order to better inform policy-making, while the draft optional protocol to the Convention should be adopted without delay, in order to provide legal remedies to discrimination and to violations of women's rights.

48. Too often, tradition and custom were invoked to justify discrimination against women and violation of their rights to property ownership, reproductive health and employment. The girl child could be particularly vulnerable to such practices, with serious consequences for her physical and mental health. Governments and the international community should do more to adopt appropriate legislation and raise awareness in that area.

49. The establishment of a more egalitarian society was one of the Government's policy priorities. To that end, it had amended its nationality laws, so that men and women were placed on an equal footing with regard to parental rights and the right of foreign spouses to Korean nationality, while plans were under way to amend the civil code, so as to improve the status of women within the family. The Republic of Korea remained committed to eliminating discrimination against women in government institutions and the private sector.

50. Despite the shifting of attention away from the Beijing Platform to the current global crisis, the Republic of Korea continued to uphold the goals of that Platform, convinced that women's full participation in society was vital to sustainable development and prosperity.

51. **Mr. Shamsudin** (Malaysia) said that Malaysia would continue to promote women's rights, and its efforts to foster an environment conducive to the advancement of women in the political, economic and social spheres remaining a priority. However, it was increasingly concerned about the effects of globalization and market liberalization on the most vulnerable, particularly women, children and older persons, in many developing countries: the economic downturns they were facing reduced their capacity to meet their commitments to protect the rights of those affected.

52. Pursuant to the Beijing Platform for Action, Malaysia had implemented a comprehensive national plan to empower women and improve their status; the relevant national machinery had been strengthened, enforcement mechanisms for the 1994 Domestic Violence Act had been established, public-education efforts were under way and gender-sensitization training programmes for the relevant agencies

had been put in place. Under the current national plan (1996–2000), special attention was being given to the role and status of women in a range of development programmes.

53. Legal, institutional and other constraints on fuller participation by women in development had been reviewed: the relevant ministerial division dealing with women's issues had been upgraded to a full-fledged department, and laws deemed discriminatory against women continued to be reviewed. For example, there was now no gender distinction in the right to inheritance. Moreover, in January 1998, Malaysia had withdrawn its reservations to certain articles of the Convention.

54. Malaysia, recognizing the adverse effect of poverty on women's quality of life, had introduced a Government-funded loan scheme to help those, particularly women, in extreme poverty, and had instituted courses and workshops for the economic advancement of rural women.

55. Malaysia would provide the secretariat for a regional conference on the economic advancement of rural and island women in the Asia-Pacific Region to be held in Malaysia later in October 1998. Malaysia would continue implementing specific regional and subregional training, research and information exchange activities within that framework.

56. Malaysia had developed a gender-sensitization package for government officials and had mainstreamed gender issues in all training programmes in order to facilitate participation by female students in science, advanced technology, engineering and technical education and to increase female participation in the labour market; in addition, gender-studies centres and research programmes had been established at a number of higher-education institutions.

57. Malaysia was concerned about the upwards trend in the traffic in girls and women for sexual exploitation, which thrived on poverty and unemployment. Greater regional and international efforts would have to be made to curb such activities, including those in cyberspace. Malaysia would continue its cooperation in that field, and believed that the efforts should emphasize inculcation of strong religious and moral values throughout society.

58. Malaysia believed that the international community had a duty to protect the rights of women in armed conflict: violence against women in conflict areas should be investigated and appropriate punishment meted out.

59. Malaysia believed that efforts against traditional practices that were harmful to the health of women and girls would be more effective if there were fundamental changes in societies' attitudes, and therefore considered education and public-awareness campaigns crucial. It believed also that alternatives to such harmful traditional practices should be explored, and called upon the developed countries to provide the developing countries with the necessary assistance, including financial resources.

60. Malaysia welcomed the significant progress in women's representation at senior levels within the United Nations system and encouraged the Secretary-General to continue his efforts towards achieving an equal gender distribution at all levels. It supported the recommendation by the Economic and Social Council that a gender analysis should be integral to triennial comprehensive reviews, and that those reviews should reflect developments in the advancement of women in the operational activities of the United Nations system. In that connection, the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women for the period 2002–2005 would be very significant.

61. **Ms. Pang** (Singapore) noted that some progress had been made in women's issues: more women had access to health care and education, and female participation in the public sphere was increasing. The overall situation of women in the world was, however, dismal. Two thirds of the world's 1 billion illiterate people were women and more than 70 per cent of the world's population living in extreme poverty were women. *The Human Development Report* of 1998 had pointed out that women's achievement fell below that of men in every country and concluded that there had been serious delay in creating opportunities for women.

62. In some areas the situation of women was getting worse. With greater participation in the workforce, women had had to take on increasing responsibilities; for example, 30 per cent of households worldwide relied on women as the primary breadwinner. In almost every society, women worked longer hours than men, especially in Africa and Asia. The growing global economic crisis could only worsen that situation as more families fell below the poverty line.

63. When women could not balance work and family, it was easy to conclude that there was a fundamental antagonism between the two. Yet men and women should never have to choose between personal fulfilment and family obligations, which undermined the whole idea of family as the core institution in society.

64. In Singapore, women were encouraged to pursue fulfilling careers, but special programmes had been initiated to help women balance family and work responsibilities. In addition, under a 1961 women's charter, husbands and wives had the same legal rights, duties and liabilities.

65. Another possible effect of the increasing burden on women would be failure to achieve the aims of the Beijing Conference. Indeed, that conference had reported that most of the goals of the Nairobi Conference had not been achieved. Real progress was needed before the year 2000 review in order to ensure implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and avoid having once again to express disappointment with the lack of progress.

66. **Mr. Al-Hariri** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the advancement of women was not a matter of one party granting or relinquishing rights to another: rather, it was a matter of inalienable rights, realized through the opening up of educational opportunities and establishment of the necessary conditions in which women could realize their potential in society and more fully contribute to social progress and prosperity.

67. The advancement of women in the Syrian Arab Republic was a national priority. The fact that women accounted for 50 per cent of all those in education, particularly higher education, facilitated their full participation in all aspects of life.

68. Syrian women enjoyed full political, social, cultural and economic rights as confirmed by national data. A national strategy for Syrian women until the year 2005 was being implemented through cooperation between national and international institutions. A national committee was working with the ministries involved in women's affairs and social and economic development issues to implement the main goals of the Beijing Platform for Action. Syrian women were gaining access to positions of responsibility and decision-making in all areas of political, social and economic life. Legislation had been amended, in keeping with greater awareness of women's issues. In Syria, women accounted for 20 per cent of all lawyers and 15 per cent of judges. His Government was committed to improving those figures and was working with international organizations on projects to guarantee women work opportunities, through training and the elimination of obstacles such as poverty. Women currently accounted for 20 per cent of the Syrian workforce and the Government was committed to improving that number.

69. In Syria, women were guaranteed full enjoyment of their rights to health services, while the number of women working in the health sector had increased. Women's and family health-care centres currently accounted for 75 per cent of all health-care centres in Syria, while women played a prominent role in the media.

70. The Arab women living under Israeli occupation in the Syrian Golan, Southern Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territories were deprived of their fundamental rights to education, health-care and freedom. Women's organizations in Syria were working with international organizations and human rights networks with a view to guaranteeing the full exercise of the rights of the Syrian women in the Syrian Golan through an end to the occupation.

71. Syria enjoyed cooperation with various United Nations agencies on women's issues, particularly with regard to rural women and their integration into productive employment. The Constitution firmly upheld the principle of full equality between men and women, while Syria's social and democratic climate allowed a deep understanding of the affairs of the nation and its citizens. The advancement of women on a par with men in Syria was the key to development of the individual, the family and society, with a view to creating a nation based on progress and equality.

72. **Mr. Tsogt** (Mongolia) welcomed the results of the special session of the Economic and Social Council on the integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up of major United Nations conferences and summits, and stressed the important work done by the United Nations system in the implementation of the decisions of the Beijing Conference.

73. Her Government had identified critical areas of concern, including women and economic development, the status of rural women, violence against women and human rights, poverty reduction and health, and had adopted a national programme of action for the advancement of women. Initiatives on job creation and income generation had been implemented in cooperation with a number of regional, international and non-governmental organizations. She further noted that the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for Women (INSTRAW) would hold a national training seminar in March 1999, in collaboration with the Government, on sex disaggregated data and the use of statistics and indicators on gender issues in policy design.

74. Ensuring equal rights for men and women had always been one of the fundamental principles of State policy, and abuses such as forced marriages, forced abortions and prostitution were considered criminal acts. However, alcohol abuse and worsening poverty had been identified as major causes of the increase of crimes and violence against women. Women's non-governmental organizations and the authorities were collaborating closely to provide medical, moral and legal support to victims of such crimes. Like many countries in transition, Mongolia was facing many social challenges. The Government had mobilized all resources to

remedy those problems and welcomed continued assistance from donor countries, international financial institutions and the United Nations.

75. **Ms. Tarr-Whelan** (United States of America) expressed the hope that delegations would, over the following days, reaffirm the commitments made at Beijing and reinvigorate their actions in those areas. With regard to gender mainstreaming, she stressed that women would in future be able to contribute their full potential only if they enjoyed equal rights, equal access and equal protection. She expressed satisfaction at the commitment shown by the Secretary-General and the heads of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to mainstream a gender perspective, and was encouraged that efforts were under way to ensure that every person at every level of the United Nations system had the skills and ability in keeping with the commitment shown at the highest levels. She would work closely with colleagues to ensure that the International Year of Older Persons and the five-year reviews of the International Conference on Population and Development and of the World Summit for Social Development would incorporate a gender perspective.

76. Her delegation was encouraged by preparations undertaken by the Commission on the Status of Women for the five-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and looked forward to further discussing that review, which should include best practices and lessons learned. Strategies to overcome obstacles and increase public awareness would contribute to realization of the Beijing commitments. Most importantly, the review should not "reopen Beijing" but rather reaffirm Member States' commitment to the Declaration and Platform for Action. Her Government, for example, was working at the highest levels to mainstream women's issues.

77. The Government was also working bilaterally and multilaterally to eradicate the growing problem of trafficking in women and girls and she invited others to join in that fight. The crucial role played by non-governmental organizations had been recognized, and efforts to combat trafficking in women and girls had been elevated to a new level of priority in March 1998 when, at an event attended by Secretary-General Kofi Annan in honour of International Women's Day, President Clinton had issued an executive order on combating violence against women and trafficking in women and girls.

78. She welcomed the draft resolution on traditional practices affecting the health of women, and urged Governments and non-governmental organizations to work together, in consultation with religious and cultural leaders, to eliminate such practices. She expressed satisfaction that preparations for the five-year review of the International Conference on Population and Development focused on the health, education and status of women and girls since social investments in women yielded the highest return to society, allowing them to be more economically productive and to engage in public life. As the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights approached, she stressed that delegations to the Beijing Conference had reiterated their commitment to that Declaration and its application to all people, affirming that human rights were women's rights and women's rights were human rights.

79. **Mr. Rasheed** (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that the "apartheid of gender" knew no age limit and had life-long ramifications. Over time, it was translated into social and economic oppression, discrimination, disadvantage, deprivation and exploitation. When women were denied full participation in the political, social and economic development of their communities, they were denied their basic human rights.

80. In the follow-up to Beijing, UNICEF had focused its attention on girls' education, the health of girls and women, and children's and women's rights. Its country programmes provided for integrated and coordinated action, offering new opportunities for advocacy and programme development at national levels.

81. UNICEF had been a partner in initiatives aimed at creating a positive, enabling environment for gender equality, and most countries had prepared national plans expressing their commitment to action. However, much remained to be done, particularly in the areas of the girl child, violence against women, women in armed conflict and the human rights of girls and women.

82. States could utilize human-rights instruments to facilitate decision-making and resource allocation. They could act to guarantee girls access to and the benefits of social services, creating opportunities for girls and women to obtain information and participate more fully in decision-making. A rights-based approach could eliminate such practices as female genital mutilation and early marriage, as well as sexual abuse, violence against girls and women, and trafficking.

83. States should delay no further in ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and in amending their national legislation accordingly. However, legislation alone was not enough. Policy and legislation should be implemented so as to make a real difference to the lives of girls and women.

84. Strategies for ensuring the participation of women and girls should include consideration of obstacles to the enjoyment of their rights. The principle of indivisibility of rights was of utmost importance. Women and girls suffered doubly when the violence they suffered in the home or in the community also infringed their right to development, participation and education.

85. Particular attention should be given to socialization of girls and boys through parent/caregiver programmes and the education of children. Socialization processes provided the means for breaking old patterns and creating new values based on respect for human rights, including the rights of girls and women.

86. Adolescents required more focused attention. While girls education and health had been addressed by many national plans, equal importance should be given to their participation. Experience showed that girls had the awareness and resources to resolve their problems, and enhanced participation would facilitate self-expression and meaningful inter-personal communication. Girls needed to acquire the skills and confidence in early childhood that would allow them access to leadership roles, to informed choices and to participating on an equal footing in change processes. Education and the media played a critical role in that regard.

87. The availability of resources was crucial. With dwindling international aid and social and economic crises in some countries, the rights of women and children were likely to suffer. More widespread application of the 20:20 initiative (Platform for Action, para. 358) should help to increase the resources required for basic social services.

88. Reform of the United Nations and of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) should help place the needs of women and children higher on the United Nations agenda. UNICEF viewed UNDAF as a means for accelerating implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and was working closely with other agencies to that end. The strategy provided an opportunity at the country level for a unified approach to human rights and gender issues, addressed in complementary ways. UNICEF looked forward to the Beijing review in 2000 and called on its partners to work together to ensure the equal rights of girls and women.

89. **Mr. Fullemann** (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that women did not constitute a vulnerable group solely on the basis of their gender; some, such as expectant mothers, had special needs and ran special risks. In addition, women often suffered from general patterns of discrimination, which could be exacerbated during periods of armed conflicts. The tragic plight of women in armed conflicts resulted not from a lack of humanitarian rules to protect them but rather from the failure to implement existing rules. The changing nature of warfare posed a number of challenges which required a redoubling of efforts by all engaged in promoting implementation of those rules. The recent adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court could prove an important step towards enhancing compliance with humanitarian law; there was no longer any doubt that rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, and forced sterilization and other forms of sexual violence constituted war crimes. Bringing those crimes, whether they occurred in international or national armed conflicts, under the jurisdiction of the court was a major achievement in the struggle against impunity.

90. It was necessary to ensure that women fully benefited from measures aimed at meeting the needs of the general population and, as reaffirmed by the Beijing Conference, that specific steps should be taken to help those with special needs. The general legal principle of non-discrimination did not preclude different treatment where such was justified on legitimate grounds and, therefore, humanitarian law also sought to address the needs of women in employing broad inclusive terms such as "civilian population" and prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of sex. Humanitarian law also contained specific provisions addressing the particular needs of women. The ICRC would seek to ensure that the principle of non-discrimination was adhered to in the application of humanitarian law and, where women faced serious and systematic discrimination, would have to decide whether the interests of the victims were best served by its continued presence. ICRC must be able to carry on its work in a non-discriminatory fashion and needed to make a careful assessment of the possibilities for meaningful dialogue with the relevant authorities, with a view to changing their conduct.

91. ICRC had recently completed a detailed analysis of how best to undertake its future work, identifying current challenges and ways to better assist victims. In that context, it had decided to examine the situation of women in armed conflicts, and field delegations had been providing gender-specific information on current activities for some time. As part of the campaign to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, a questionnaire would also be circulated to a cross-section of the population, including war-affected women, in a number of different countries. In-depth group discussions would be organized and experts and organizations experienced in that area would be consulted. The information gathered would form the basis for an

assessment of humanitarian law and operational activities with a view to developing guidelines to improve humanitarian action in connection with armed conflict.

92. That initiative was faithful to the principle of impartiality, which ruled out an exclusively gender-specific approach, although giving priority to those in greatest need required that the needs of all victims, including those of women, should be addressed. ICRC hoped that those initiatives would lead to a better understanding of the problems faced by women in the event of armed conflict and thereby contribute to a more effective response by the international community.

The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.

United Nations A/C.3/53/SR.15

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Third Committee

Summary record of the 15th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 16 October 1998, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Hachani ..... (Tunisia)
later: Mr. Carranza (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Guatemala)
later: Mr. Hachani (Chairman) ..... (Tunisia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 103: Advancement of women *(continued)* (A/53/38/Rev.1, A/53/72–S/1998/156, A/53/87, A/53/95–S/1998/311, A/53/167, 203, 318, 354, 363, 376, 409 and 447)

Agenda item 104: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women *(continued)* (A/53/72–S/1998/156, A/53/87, A/53/95–S/1998/311 and A/53/308)

1. **Ms. Fong** (World Bank) said that poverty reduction was at the heart of the World Bank's mission. Increasingly recognizing that gender was an important part of poverty reduction strategies and programmes, the Bank was mainstreaming gender in its research and analysis and in its lending and training programmes.

2. At the Beijing Conference, the President of the Bank had made a commitment to girls' education, in support of the goal that by the year 2010 all girls would be able to complete primary education and an equal number of boys and girls would go on to secondary education. The Bank would be devoting some $900 million per year to that goal by the end of the decade. Lending for girls' education had increased substantially and 31 countries were receiving assistance. The Bank was working in that area with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (with regard to statistics), non-governmental organizations, local authorities and women's groups.

3. The Bank's approach to development focused on social, political, cultural and environmental aspects. It not only dealt with macroeconomics, it also empowered people.

4. In the 1998 financial year, over half the Bank's country assistance strategies, the main vehicle in its dialogue with Governments and civil society, including non-governmental organizations, had addressed gender. Those strategies varied from country to country and the Bank was currently reviewing them in order to learn from those that had addressed gender effectively.

5. The Bank was currently preparing, in cooperation with civil society and development experts, a policy research report on gender and development, to be launched in June 2000, designed to strengthen the conceptual links between gender, public policy and development. By incorporating gender as a central tool in economic analysis, the Bank hoped to show how to enhance the equity, efficiency and sustainability of development policies and programmes.

6. Gender was also being mainstreamed in the Bank's *World Development Report* on poverty, to be issued in the year 2000. It also expected to launch in 2004 a *World Development Report* devoted entirely to gender in development.

7. With regard to lending, some 35 per cent of the Bank's portfolio addressed gender issues, especially in the social and agricultural sectors but also, increasingly, in sectors such as infrastructure. Apart from assistance to girls' education, its initiatives included the safe motherhood programme and microfinancing for poor households, with women accounting for over 70 per cent of the beneficiaries of the latter programme.

8. The Bank was also transforming itself into a knowledge bank that could share know-how and experience with clients and partners across the world. It had created a gender Web page with links to other key gender Web sites, developed a training package on gender, staff networks and thematic groups, set up a capacity-building programme and conducted seminars to enhance knowledge of gender issues.

9. The Bank had made substantial progress in the past three years in mainstreaming gender in poverty reduction, expanding its activities related to gender in development, and creating fruitful partnerships throughout the development community.

10. **Mr. Yacoubou** (Benin) noted that 161 States were parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and that, despite the reservations entered by 54 of those States, the Convention was almost universal. That was cause for celebration, since the Convention was the legal frame of reference for women's rights. His country had acceded to the Convention without reservations and urged other countries to follow suit on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

11. His Government welcomed the reorganization of the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which now held pre-session meetings in which the specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations took part.

12. It also welcomed the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat and the excellent report presented on that subject (A/53/376). It urged the various departments to ensure the training and retraining of staff members able to apply for vacancies.

13. While traffic in women and girls was caused by poverty, traditional or customary practices affecting their health were based on cultural beliefs and factors which

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information and awareness-raising could help to eradicate in favour of less risky practices that had the same symbolic value.

14. His country was determined to ensure equality between men and women and to enhance the status and role of women. It could claim a number of achievements in implementing the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and the Beijing Platform for Action: the regular holding of national campaigns to raise awareness of men's and women's issues and seminars which were well reported in the press; the creation of an independent Ministry for the Status of Women and Social Affairs; an increase in the number of women at the highest levels of the Government; and equal pay for men and women.

15. Despite those achievements, Benin still had much to do to ensure gender equity; in particular, traditional education and the matrimonial property regime favoured men. A very patriarchal society could only change gradually.

16. The objectives of the Fourth World Conference on Women could only be achieved through integrated measures, and his country therefore fully supported the efforts of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women to integrate women in all activities of the agencies of the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions. That inter-agency cooperation should, of course, feature an accountability component so that objectives and results could be compared and activities reoriented if necessary.

17. His delegation was very interested in the experience acquired in the context of the United Nations country cooperation framework for Mozambique, which might be of use to other countries and contribute to the attainment of the Beijing objectives; its implementation could benefit from the support of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNIFEM and other United Nations bodies.

18. **Ms. Shawa** (Malawi), speaking on behalf of the member States of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), noted with satisfaction that at its substantive session in July 1998 the Economic and Social Council, in the context of its high-level debate on operational activities, had discussed the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the role of operational activities in promoting capacity-building and resource mobilization for enhancing the participation of women in development. SADC endorsed the recommendations formulated on that occasion. It was also pleased to note that in resolution 1998/43 the Council had taken steps to address the feminization of poverty, a problem only too familiar in southern Africa.

19. Since its establishment, SADC had focused on human development, enterprise creation, capacity-building and, more recently, productivity. It had, however, become aware that gender equality was essential to development and had embarked on an ambitious programme that should enable it to reverse gender imbalance in the region in the shortest possible time. To that end, the Heads of State of the SADC countries had signed in September 1997 a declaration on gender and development which had served as a basis for the draft plan of action for gender in the region.

20. After the Beijing Conference, SADC had identified the main problems facing the region: insufficient mechanisms to promote the advancement of women; inequality between women and men in decision-making and access to productive activities and resources; inequality in economic structures and policies; inadequate protection of women and girls; and peace, conflict resolution and management. It had also produced a report on gender activities which had been widely circulated. It should be noted that each member country had drawn up its own plan of action or was in the process of doing so.

21. In November 1997 SADC, in cooperation with UNIFEM, had organized a very successful expo/trade fair in Zimbabwe which had been intended to give exposure to goods produced by women in the informal sector and to facilitate the formation of trade links within the region and with industrialized countries.

22. In February 1998, the SADC countries had participated in a workshop organized in Zambia aimed at enabling them to integrate gender issues and concerns in their national plans of action relating to the environment, land management, and the combat against desertification.

23. In March 1998, SADC had organized in South Africa, in connection with International Women's Day, a regional conference on prevention of violence against women, aimed at raising public awareness of problems relating to such violence in southern Africa and making the Year a period dedicated to combating it. The participants in the Conference had been able to share ideas and exchange experience not only among themselves but also with representatives of other countries and to discuss such subjects as sexual harassment, domestic violence, prostitution, rape, pornography, femicide, the social, cultural, economic and religious context of violence, existing legislation on the subject, training, and raising of public awareness of the problem, particularly through schools, the media and theatre.

24. Likewise in March 1998, SADC had organized in Zimbabwe a women parliamentarian's workshop on violence against women, at which member Governments had resolved to take legislative and educational measures and provide certain services to combat violence of that type.

25. In April 1998, SADC had participated in a consultative meeting on the launching and promotion of the female condom held in South Africa and organized by UNAIDS, WHO and Population Services International. SADC had decided that AIDS was a developmental issue and should be addressed in a wider context. In the same month, it had participated in the ECA Conference on African Women and Economic Development held in Addis Ababa.

26. In June–July 1998, SADC had organized in South Africa a conference on women and trade aimed at helping women to maximize their participation in micro-trade, share experiences and documents, incorporate a gender perspective into macroeconomic policies and bilateral and multilateral agreements and formulate common strategies for advocacy.

27. In June 1998, SADC had established within its secretariat a gender unit whose responsibilities included coordinating and advising the secretariat on gender issues, mainstreaming gender in SADC sectoral development programmes and finalizing the draft SADC plan of action. The latter was intended to promote gender equality and develop a policy and institutional framework for gender mainstreaming in the policies, programmes and activities of SADC member States and in SADC structures and the SADC programme of action, cultivate a culture of equity between men and women and respect for women, facilitate gender equality in access to economic structures and resources, promote female representation in decision-making structures, foster peace, evaluate the impact of war on women and children, and monitor the implementation of the 1997 Declaration on Gender Development and the programme of action.

28. SADC, which was committed to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and could reach its goals with the help of its development partners, was looking forward to the convening of the special session of the General Assembly in the year 2000.

29. **Mr. Ocazionez** (Colombia) said that the current financial crisis had grave implications for the situation of women, because it had been demonstrated that they were always the first to lose their jobs and suffer from the deterioration of the social infrastructure in a country. Moreover, they were often victims of violence by men who were frustrated by the decline in their standards of living. Colombia was affected by the scourge of violence and was therefore gratified that, in 1997, UNIFEM, in collaboration with various other United Nations bodies, governments and civil society in countries of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, had launched a vast programme to combat violence against women. Colombia, for its part, had developed various programmes which were described in a report which it had submitted to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice at Vienna and to the Special Rapporteur on violence against women at Geneva.

30. His Government attached great importance to those programmes because it believed that they constituted one of the best means of remedying the violence from which society had suffered so severely for decades. However, it was not enough to provide legal and social protection for women, they must also be enabled to play a role in the promotion of peace and dialogue and the settlement of social conflicts. Peace was based on respect for the human being and any discrimination or violence against women therefore hindered the establishment of a climate conducive to negotiations.

31. The national office for equality between men and women had established various programmes to promote social peace. It had organized regional and national meetings and produced television programmes which stressed the role of women in scientific and artistic fields and at the level of information and communities and their constructive presence within civil society.

32. Colombia was gratified that UNIFEM had established networks of women in favour of peace in various countries of the world, particularly in Africa, which had been hard hit by war. The women of that continent had helped consolidate peace in their countries and reconstruct economies that were devastated by years of conflict. His Government supported those efforts and hoped that the international community would do likewise.

33. **Ms. Arystanbekova** (Kazakhstan) said that improving the status of women and mainstreaming them were among the most important aspects of social development. The Beijing Platform for Action, which defined the priority areas of action, afforded an opportunity for achieving gender equality in all spheres, as did the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women 1996–2001. Despite the political, cultural, financial and other problems which were impeding the implementation of that plan, the experience gained should be duly taken into account when drawing up a new plan. Mention should also be made of the adoption by the Economic and Social Council of agreed conclusions on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all strategies and programmes, which should make it possible to achieve real progress. While welcoming the progress made in the

representation of women in senior posts in the Secretariat, her delegation was concerned about the situation in posts subject to geographical distribution.

34. While advances had been made recently in the implementation of the decisions taken at the Fourth World Conference on Women because society was becoming aware of the need to eliminate the existing imbalances between men and women in order to achieve harmonious development, problems persisted. In that connection, the role of the international instruments designed to promote the attainment of the objectives defined at the Fourth World Conference on Women should also be recognized. Kazakhstan had ratified the Convention, without any reservations, and was counting on the cooperation of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Division for the Advancement of Women for the practical implementation of the provisions of the Convention. In the context of building democracy and an open society, the President of Kazakhstan had put forward a comprehensive democratization programme covering elections, political parties, parliament, civil society, the judicial system, the status of women and the mass media. With regard to the status of women, the President had proposed strengthening the role of the council on problems of the family, women and population policy and eventually transforming it into a special commission on women's problems. He had also proposed specific measures, particularly increasing the representation of women in all organs of power, stepping up the campaign to combat violence against women and creating the conditions for the establishment of a bank to grant loans to women. A national plan for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action had been drawn up and approved. Representatives of the council and other women's non-governmental organizations had participated actively in various conferences and workshops at the national, regional and international levels, concerned in particular with the development of mechanisms for the formulation of national plans of action and the analysis of the obstacles impeding the full participation of women in political, economic and social life, women and military conflicts, and trafficking in women.

35. Within the context of cooperation with international organizations and programmes and funds of the United Nations system, her Government and UNDP had signed a microcredit project designed to provide assistance to women, create a working model for replication in other fields and ensure training and the advancement of women. However, that project was being implemented in only two of the five planned regions of Kazakhstan because of insufficient financial resources. The national employment promotion programme, approved each year by her Government, included a special section on the employment of women, who were entering the labour market in increasing numbers. The situation with regard to the development of women's small and medium-sized businesses was more problematic, however, because of the absence of State legal support, mechanisms for loans and for financing on favourable terms, and economic incentives. In view of the importance of international cooperation in resolving such issues, her delegation requested the relevant programmes and funds of the United Nations system, including UNIFEM, which had solid experience in that field, to provide assistance to Kazakhstan. She expressed the hope that the resumed session of the Economic and Social Council in 1999, devoted to the role of employment in eradicating poverty, would make it possible to find innovative solutions to that urgent problem.

36. **Ms. Mekhemar** (Egypt) said that since the holding of the Beijing Conference, remarkable advances had been made in promoting and demarginalizing women and in applying the principle of gender mainstreaming in all the activities of the United Nations and its agencies. The Economic and Social Council had made laudable efforts in that regard, in particular when it had decided to emphasize the feminization of poverty during the 1999 debate on the eradication of poverty and had underscored the role the United Nations system must play in helping Governments to meet their obligations under international instruments.

37. Egypt, having understood since the end of the nineteenth century that there could be no real development without the equal participation of both sexes, had always given priority to the rights of women, by safeguarding them in its Constitution and ensuring gender equality in both health care and education. Egypt was also implementing all the conventions relating to the rights of women and had drawn up a national plan of action to implement the Beijing Platform for Action.

38. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had in 1998 considered a report on reservations to the Convention and decided at its seventeenth session to make a statement on the occasion of the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights regarding those reservations, particularly to article 2 of the Convention. As to the position that the human rights treaties by their very nature could not be subject to reservations, her delegation believed that no distinction could be made between the human rights instruments and other treaties. Treaty law, especially the Vienna Convention of 1979, did not in fact accord any particular status to the human rights instruments in the

matter of reservations. Good progress had been made on the elaboration of a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, but some crucial issues had not yet been taken up by the relevant Working Group and it was therefore not possible to set an exact timetable for drafting and adopting the protocol.

39. **Ms. Lacanlale** (Philippines) said that she welcomed the continuing attention given by the United Nations system to the follow-up to and implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and was particularly pleased with the progress achieved in mainstreaming a gender perspective in United Nations activities. She endorsed the recommendations of the Economic and Social Council on operational activities as a means of promoting capacity-building and resource mobilization in order to enhance the participation of women in development, and especially the inclusion of gender issues in the triennial policy review of operational activities for development. She especially commended UNIFEM for its strong advocacy of women's economic empowerment and its innovative activities at the grass-roots level. She endorsed the agreed conclusions drawn up by the Commission on the Status of Women regarding the four critical areas and encouraged Governments to refer to them in preparing or updating their national action plans. She also urged Member States which had not done so to prepare and submit their national action plans in time for the preparations for the high-level review in the year 2000. Proper indicators had to be developed to determine whether concrete, measurable changes had taken place in women's lives.

40. Trafficking in women and girls was an issue in which her delegation had a keen interest because of the large number of victims in the Pacific region. The Philippines strongly condemned trafficking as a serious violation of human rights and believed that problem could be fought only with international cooperation. Her delegation would therefore be submitting another resolution on the issue and hoped that it would receive broad support. The slow progress on the problem could be explained by the differences in the approaches taken and the ongoing debate on the issues of prostitution and sexual exploitation. Focused measures should be taken, especially in the areas of education and consciousness-raising, training, advocacy, social assistance and legal reform. The breakthroughs in information technology, and the development of the Internet, had greatly facilitated trafficking. It was, of course, right to hesitate to take strong measures that would impinge on certain fundamental freedoms, yet to safeguard those freedoms might unwittingly be to condone the violation of the human rights of the trafficked women and children. Governments should join hands with civil society and the private sector to find ways of preventing that useful means of communication from being used for shameful purposes. Given the nature of the problem, cooperation among States was essential. In that connection, the bilateral project between the Philippines and Belgium on trafficking in women was a good example of a joint initiative. Her Government was exploring the possibility of concluding similar agreements with other countries. Within the United Nations system, there had been various excellent initiatives to address the problem of trafficking in women and children. The Philippines called on the Inter-agency Committee on Women and Gender Issues to coordinate system-wide activities in that area.

41. Many traditional and customary practices still existed that were harmful to the health of women and girls and were clearly violations of human rights, and her delegation was pleased that Governments and the international community were actively trying to eliminate them. To succeed in doing so would require education and public-awareness campaigns. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women remained a strong instrument for the protection of women's rights and would be further strengthened if it were universally ratified by the year 2000. Her delegation urged States parties to withdraw their reservations to provisions of the Convention. It was concerned over the large number of initial reports that were overdue, and invited Member States to extend assistance to the States parties that were unable to carry out their treaty obligations, particularly the least developed countries, by contributing to a trust fund for the purpose.

42. The impact of the financial crisis on the general population and particularly on its marginalized and vulnerable sectors, including women, was already being felt. The feminization of poverty had become more acute as economic opportunities became more limited. The economic crisis should be a harsh reminder to the international community that it could not bide its time in implementing the commitments it had made in Beijing.

43. **Ms. Barghouti** (Observer for Palestine) said that the attention given by the international community to the advancement of women, their integration in development and their human rights needed to be transformed into action in fulfilment of the objectives set by the Beijing Platform for Action. Her delegation therefore welcomed the General Assembly's decision to hold, in the year 2000, a high-level review to assess the progress made in implementing the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and the Beijing Platform for Action, and hoped that

the outcome of that session would be to adopt an innovative approach and action-oriented programme for the implementation for those important documents. Little progress had been achieved worldwide in the advancement of women, who continued to suffer from inequality, violence, poverty, the negative effects of armed conflict and foreign occupation, and the violation of their basic rights. There had to be a political commitment on the part of Governments to finding solutions to those serious problems.

44. Palestinian women, who were striving for peace, freedom and prosperity, were faced with the harsh reality of the continuing Israeli occupation, which was the main obstacle to their advancement. The building of illegal Israeli colonial settlements, the confiscation of land and water and the recurrent closure of the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and other oppressive measures were adversely affecting the overall situation of Palestinian women. Furthermore, the long years of occupation had led to an increase in the number of refugees and displaced persons, the breaking up of families, the deterioration of health conditions, a decline in education and an increase in unemployment. Nevertheless, Palestinian women continued to participate actively in the struggle for freedom and independence. Inspired by the principles of equality and social justice for all, they sought to strengthen the role and functions of women's institutions with a view to enhancing their effectiveness in mainstreaming women's issues in policies, plans and programmes; to increase awareness among the leadership of the importance of equity between the sexes in economic and social planning; to mobilize the media and non-governmental organizations; and to increase women's representation in decision-making posts. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/1998/2/Add.2), the status and living conditions of Palestinian women were closely linked with the progress of the peace process. Consequently, any deterioration of that process would impede the progress to which Palestinian women aspired. The international community, and in particular the United Nations, must therefore continue to support Palestinian women and increase assistance to them during the current difficult phase of their struggle for equality, development and peace.

45. **Ms. Aguiar** (Dominican Republic) said that her country, which attached particular importance to the situation of women, had signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Convention had proved to be an excellent means of promoting dialogue between the public institutions responsible for the integration of women in political, economic, social and cultural life and civil society, represented by non-governmental organizations which brought together women from all strata of society with a view to exchanging ideas on women's conception of their role and their ability to take charge of their own destinies. The internal mechanisms provided for in the Convention had at least given women the right to be heard in a society dominated by men. Women in the developing countries encountered many difficulties, particularly poverty, by which they were hardest hit, especially in rural areas. There was an urgent need, therefore, to integrate them in development by facilitating their access to microcredit and land ownership through appropriate legislation. The law on agrarian reform adopted by the Dominican Republic conferred on Dominican women for the first time the legal capacity to own the plot of land which provided the means of substance for themselves and their families. Non-governmental organizations had established cooperatives in rural areas which acted as banks for women who were unable to obtain finance for their small farms and businesses. There was, however, a need to intensify efforts in the field of education and with respect to women's participation in political life. The electoral law had thus been amended to guarantee women a quota of seats in elected assemblies and councils. A national commission had been established to coordinate the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, and there were national plans of action for equality, development and peace, which defined the measures the Dominican Government must take in order to achieve gender equality, eliminate discrimination against women and fulfil the commitments made by the country at the regional and international levels. Those hopeful portents should not, however, obscure the very grave problem confronting women throughout the world, namely violence (one of the most insidious forms being domestic violence), to which women were subjected both in developing countries and in the developed nations. Her delegation welcomed in that connection the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, which, for the first time, defined sexual crimes perpetrated against women and children as war crimes. She also welcomed the efforts undertaken at the regional level in Africa to eradicate harmful traditional practices which undermined the dignity of women and girls.

46. **Ms. Sandru** (Romania) said that her delegation wished to associate itself with the statement by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union, and that she would therefore confine her remarks to certain specific aspects of the issue. The fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provided the international community with an opportunity to evaluate the current situation of women's rights, which were universal

human rights, and to give a new impetus to their promotion. Her delegation wished to emphasize in that respect the importance of the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was to be finalized and adopted very shortly.

47. As a party to the Convention, Romania was particularly keen to establish a constructive dialogue with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and would shortly be submitting its fourth periodic report.

48. Romania's national strategy reflected the efforts of the international community to promote gender equality. The national plan of action for equal opportunities drawn up by the Department for the Advancement of Women comprised two sections: the first set out normative measures aimed at guaranteeing respect for women's rights, while the second contained practical steps aimed at ensuring the de facto exercise of those rights. Romania was setting up an interdepartmental committee to review the implementation of the national plan of action. The various legislative measures aimed at enhancing women's economic status were accompanied by administrative measures to assist those women most affected by the economic reforms. Her Government believed that it was necessary to draft a new Labour Code incorporating provisions on equal opportunities for both sexes.

49. In 1996, the Romanian authorities, deeply concerned by domestic violence, had established specialized structures to prevent that phenomenon and to assist the victims, in close cooperation with non-governmental organizations.

50. While it was the responsibility of Governments to translate the recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action into reality, that goal could not be achieved without the assistance of the international community. Romania welcomed cooperation with the United Nations, one example being the programme aimed at developing institutional capacity in the field of women's rights which it had undertaken with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It also welcomed the project launched jointly by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and UNDP to strengthen the capacity of women in political decision-making and the UNIFEM initiative for rural women, which illustrated the importance of the decision taken in 1997 by the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund to allow the countries of central and eastern Europe to benefit from the remarkable skills of UNIFEM in that area. Romania was committed to contributing to the preparation of the special session of the General Assembly to be held in the year 2000. .

51. *Mr. Carranza (Guatemala), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

52. **Mr. Rim Yong Chol** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that, in order to achieve social equality between the sexes, it was vital to guarantee, not only in law but also in practice, equal participation by women in socio-political and economic activities. To that end, countries must adopt social policies and invest in the advancement of women.

53. That was the case in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, where women not only enjoyed *de jure* equality, but also participated actively in the socio-political and economic life of the country.

54. At the international level, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea appreciated the efforts of United Nations agencies, particularly UNIFEM, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and hoped that additional funding would be allocated in the future to agencies working for the advancement of women, particularly in developing countries.

55. In tackling violence against women, which constituted the most serious violation of their fundamental rights, the international community must focus particular attention on the social origin of the problem, and take vigorous legal and social measures to punish the perpetrators. In order to eradicate the problem, it was also necessary to begin by educating young people.

56. It was important, in that connection, that the Japanese Government should recognize its responsibility for the sexual slavery to which the "comfort women" had been subjected by the Japanese Government and military authorities during the Second World War, and that it should be willing to apologize and offer compensation.

57. **Mr. El-Humaimidi** (Iraq) said that his Government attached particular importance to the advancement of women and gender equality, as demonstrated by article 19 of the Iraqi Constitution, Act No. 191 of 1975, which stipulated equal rights between men and women concerning financial benefits, and the Legislative Reform Act No. 35 of 1977, which provided for the amendment of the laws and regulations in force in order to tailor them to the need to create a society based on equality. In addition to being able to occupy the highest positions, Iraqi women, including those living in the remotest areas, enjoyed numerous social benefits. However, the armed aggression in 1991 and the

ensuing embargo, which had continued for over eight years, had had serious consequences for the advancement of women, who, apart from the physical and moral suffering which they endured, were no longer able to play their economic and social roles.

58. Despite those difficult conditions, Iraq had not reneged on its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and endeavoured to submit its periodic reports; the first report had been submitted in 1993 and the second and third during the previous week. A high-level national committee for the advancement of Iraqi women, composed of both governmental and non-governmental bodies, had been established in June 1997 as part of the international strategy for the advancement of women, adopted in accordance with the resolutions of the Fourth World Conference on Women and submitted to the United Nations Secretariat in July 1997.

59. The suffering endured by Iraqi women as a result of the embargo was incompatible with the resolutions of international conferences on women whereby the international community assumed a commitment to enhance the status of women, particularly in the fields of education and employment. In that regard, paragraph 145 (i) of the Beijing Platform for Action stated that measures should be taken with a view to alleviating the negative impact of sanctions on women and children. The first measure to be taken in order to enable Iraqi women to enjoy all their rights and play their pioneering role in society was to lift the economic embargo on the country.

60. **Mrs. Nguyen** (Viet Nam) said that her delegation fully associated itself with the statement delivered by the Indonesian representative on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

61. The implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was but a continuation of Viet Nam's policy in favour of the advancement of Vietnamese women. Her country had established a National Committee for the advancement of women, which had been assigned the task of formulating a national plan of action aimed at eliminating the feminization of poverty and empowering women. The plan also set specific targets to be achieved by the year 2000, *inter alia*, a reduction in the rate of unemployment among women in urban areas, the eradication of illiteracy among female workers aged 15 to 35, the universalization of primary education and an increase in the number of girl pupils in secondary schools, as well as in the number of trained female workers and of female members of elected bodies. As part of that national plan of action, her Government had created job opportunities and income-generating activities for women, provided women with equal access to education, particularly in literacy programmes, improved health care for women and children and enhanced the role of women in leadership mechanisms. In that connection, she underlined that Viet Nam was one of the countries in the Asian Pacific region with the highest rate of women representatives in the National Assembly. Her Government had issued special instructions to the authorities at all levels in the country to pay due attention to the training of women employees. Furthermore, with the assistance of the Netherlands Government and the International Labour Organization, a training and information dissemination programme on the rights of women workers had come into operation in March 1998.

62. At the global level, she noted with satisfaction the many activities which had been carried out throughout the United Nations system with a view to implementing the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women. The National Committee for the advancement of women in Viet Nam was currently working on the second periodic report to be submitted by her country to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) by the end of 1998. Viet Nam commended the decision of the Economic and Social Council to devote special attention to the causes and remedies of the feminization of poverty.

63. It was regrettable that many countries had not yet submitted their national action plans or strategies as a follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action. In addition, the conversion of policy declarations into concrete policies and actions at both the national and the international levels required not only political will but also adequate allocations of financial and human resources. It was therefore particularly important to promote the implementation of the 20:20 initiative, as mentioned in paragraph 358 of the Beijing Platform for Action.

64. *Mr. Hachani (Tunisia) resumed the Chair.*

65. **Mrs. Camara** (Guinea) said that adequate financial resources were essential to ensure appropriate follow-up of the Fourth World Conference on Women; to that end the contributions to development agencies should be increased.

66. Her delegation appreciated the Secretary-General's efforts to implement the strategic plan of action for the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat and encouraged him in his efforts to ensure that, by the year 2000, 50 per cent of the posts subject to geographical distribution would be held by women.

67. Applauding the quality of the field work carried out by the United Nations Development Fund for Women

(UNIFEM), her delegation believed that the Fund should cooperate even more closely with its partners. It would also be appropriate to strengthen the role and mandate of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), which required a stable financial base.

68. She supported all efforts to combat the traffic in women and girls and said that the international community should carry out effective and coordinated action in that field.

69. Her Government had established a mechanism for the advancement of women and had taken measures to ensure gender equality and ascertain that the rights of women (who constituted 51.3 per cent of the population) were integrated into all national programmes. The increase in the number of women in decision-making positions demonstrated that there was a will to ensure that women participated in the management of public affairs. In 1996, the Government had created a Ministry for social, women's and children's affairs, which was responsible for the follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action and for elaborating the national policy for the advancement of women; it had also established a national fund to support women's activities and formulated a national plan of action that constituted an integral part of the national plan for human development and the Government's development strategy to the year 2010, the aim being to enhance legislation relating to the advancement and protection of women, strengthen institutions, reinforce the role of women in the family, as well as their social and cultural role, improve the status of women and secure their economic advancement.

70. In cooperation with the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), the Ministry was implementing a project aimed at raising awareness among girls who were either illiterate or school drop-outs on the subject of health and reproduction. In cooperation with the World Bank, it had provided non-governmental organizations and various other groups with access to information and means of reducing population growth and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) had also devised a project on the participation of women in development. She expressed her Government's gratitude to all of its partners in development and its hope that it would continue to benefit from international cooperation with a view to the successful fulfilment of its task.

71. **Ms. Šiminović** (Croatia) said that her country had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and, pursuant to article 134 of the Croatian Constitution, the provisions of the Convention had a higher legal status than national laws. Croatia was carrying out ongoing legal reform, and was careful to ensure that laws which were in the process of being adopted, such as the draft law on family relations, were compatible with the Convention. In January 1998 the Croatian Government had presented its initial report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. It had welcomed the opportunity to engage in an open dialogue with the Committee, and had appreciated the presence of domestic non-governmental organizations. Her delegation welcomed the Committee's concluding comments, which had been widely disseminated in Croatia and which had made an important contribution to the implementation of the Convention. In accordance with the Committee's suggestions, which included measures to eliminate stereotyping and improve the participation of women in political life, the National Commission for Equality, in cooperation with political parties, non-governmental organizations, social partners and the Council of Europe, was organizing a seminar to be held in November 1998 on the participation of women in political life. Her delegation welcomed the progress that had been made in the elaboration of an optional protocol to the Convention which should contribute to the full implementation thereof.

72. Pursuant to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, on 9 May 1996 the Croatian Government had established the National Commission for Equality, and in December 1997 had adopted the National Policy of Equality which incorporated an analysis of the status of women in Croatia. That analysis had demonstrated that women were consistently insufficiently represented in posts of responsibility, particularly in political positions, and that prejudice with regard to women persisted, regardless of the legislation that had been adopted. The policy pursued by Croatia therefore provided specific measures designed to increase the involvement of women, improve their economic situation, facilitate their access to health care and education, ensure respect for their rights and eliminate violence against women in times of peace as well as war. Non-governmental organizations had been invited to work with the National Commission for Equality towards the implementation of that policy. A Council of non-governmental organizations, composed of five representatives, had been established in April 1998 to support the work of the National Commission for Equality. The latter had also established a special working group to collect statistical data on women in all areas of social, political and economic life. Non-governmental organizations and the State Agency for Statistics were also involved in that project. Furthermore,

the Commission had convened a joint meeting with the National Committee for Education in Human Rights in order to remove stereotypes from school curricula and promote gender equality within the national education system.

73. With regard to domestic violence, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare was working with non-governmental organizations to provide shelters for women victims of domestic violence, and was currently organizing a seminar on that issue, in which non-governmental organizations had been invited to participate. A free consultation and advisory service on legal and employment issues was offered once a month by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. Her delegation joined others in welcoming the creation of the International Criminal Court and the decision to include sexual crimes as a category of war crime. With regard to the progress made in gender mainstreaming in United Nations policies and programmes, her delegation welcomed the efforts made in that respect by the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women to achieve the goal of parity between the sexes in the United Nations Secretariat. However, it regretted that women from countries in transition continued to be underrepresented in the Secretariat, and hoped that measures would be taken to correct that situation.

74. Her delegation wished to draw the attention of the members of the Committee to the challenges of the future with regard to reproductive health and the use of new methods of medically-assisted reproduction. In that regard, she noted that in 1996 the Council of Europe had adopted the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine and an additional protocol on human cloning, and that further additional protocols were currently under consideration. In November 1997, UNESCO had adopted the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights. In view of the recent advances which had been made in that field, her delegation proposed that the Third Committee and other relevant United Nations bodies should address the issue of new methods of medically-assisted reproduction and their impact on the reproductive rights of women and women's rights in general.

75. **Ms. Brobbey** (Ghana) said that her delegation commended the work done by United Nations bodies, non-governmental organizations, regional groups and States with a view to eliminating traditional or customary practices that affected the health of women and girls. She noted, however, that the report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on violence against women (A/CN.4/1998/54) indicated that much remained to be done in that respect. Her delegation welcomed the joint statement issued by the World Health Organization, UNICEF and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) in April 1997 on female genital mutilation.

76. Ghana had demonstrated its commitment to international conventions on the advancement of women by outlawing certain traditional and cultural practices, including those relating to widowhood, and had enacted legislation on succession in order to protect the rights of widows and children. Furthermore, some non-governmental organizations, in collaboration with the Government, had been engaged in a dialogue with community leaders in that part of Ghana where the Trokosi culture was practised.

77. Her delegation commended those States which had ratified or acceded or succeeded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and appealed to all those which had not yet done so to ratify it as soon as possible. It also supported the proposal by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights that the human rights of women should be highlighted during the activities to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/53/38/Rev.1, para. 465).

78. Her delegation endorsed the conclusions reached by the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-second session which stated that it was the responsibility of Governments to combat all forms of trafficking in women and girls (E/1998/27). Governments were urged to exchange information on that subject and to create data collection centres within Interpol, regional law enforcement agencies and national police forces. It was also important that Governments should carry out campaigns to raise women's awareness of their rights and enable them to take informed decisions.

79. She was encouraged that the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice had adopted, at its seventh session in April 1998, two resolutions to combat trafficking in women and girls by the elaboration of new international instruments aimed at combating the illegal trafficking in and transportation of migrants. She hoped that Member States, for their part, would pass laws to fight against that problem and would punish such crimes with all the severity which they deserved.

80. Concerned by the situation of women in the Secretariat, she pointed out that, according to the report of the Secretary-General on that issue (A/53/376), in spite of the efforts made, there were few women at the senior level. The Secretary-General had also pointed out that, at the current rate of progress, equality between the sexes would not be achieved before the year 2000 in the director category

and 2007 in the professional category. The review of the status of women in the organizations of the common system carried out by the International Civil Service Commission at its forty-seventh session had been just as discouraging. She called on Member States to support the Secretary-General in his task by encouraging women in their countries to apply for positions in the Professional category and above.

81. She expressed disappointment that the reports before the Third Committee made no mention of programmes aimed at educating men on the value and qualities of women. Nor was any mention made of men's responsibilities in programmes aimed at ensuring the advancement of women, failings which should be rectified in the future.

82. **Ms. Mbugua** (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)), recalling that UNFPA's policy was based on the principles of gender equality and the empowerment of women as contained in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and on the Beijing Platform for Action, noted that in 1999 a five year review and appraisal of implementation at the country level of commitments made at the former would be undertaken. Several round tables and meetings of expert groups on the subject of the advancement of women had already been organized to that end, with the participation of many organizations and representatives of various groups from society. In April 1998 a round table on adolescent reproductive health had been organized in New York. Another round table had been held in Kampala on the subjects of ensuring reproductive rights, the empowerment of women, male involvement and human rights. In November 1998 there would also be a technical meeting on reproductive health services in emergency situations. The regional commissions of the League of Arab States had also undertaken similar appraisal processes with the help of UNFPA.

83. Although the results of the appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development were encouraging, much work nevertheless remained to be done in the promotion of gender equality, women's rights, sexual hygiene and reproductive health. In that connection, greater effort was necessary to meet the special needs of the girl child, ensure her education and eliminate the problem of female genital mutilation, which was the result of the persistence of ancestral practices and which was harmful to the health and future of the girl child. In that context UNFPA was supporting education and communication activities for parents, teachers and community leaders in order to create awareness of the importance of educating girls and of the negative effects of early marriage and early childbirth. Reproductive and sexual health care was also being provided for both girls and boys. One of the successful initiatives to eradicate harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation was a project spearheaded by elders in Uganda, which had won the 1998 United Nations Population Award.

84. UNFPA was especially alarmed by the problem of violence against women. In cooperation with other organizations, it was encouraging the adoption of laws and was supporting a worldwide initiative aimed at eliminating such violence which, whatever form it took, prevented women from making their own decisions in all areas of their lives and kept them from exercising their rights. UNFPA was also encouraging men to show greater responsibility in the area of reproductive health, especially given the danger posed by HIV/AIDS. On balance, UNFPA was satisfied with its efforts and with its cooperation with government organizations and civil society, and would continue to advocate a comprehensive and holistic approach to reproductive health by endeavouring to integrate a human rights approach into its population and development activities.

85. **Ms. Lim** (International Labour Office) commended the work of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality, chaired by the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, and stressed that the International Labour Organization (ILO) had participated actively in the Committee, most recently at a workshop on the advancement of women and their basic rights. In the context of the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the World Summit for Social Development, in 1997 ILO had launched its International Programme on More and Better Jobs for Women. That programme operated at both the national and international levels and addressed particularly the linkages between women's employment, poverty, sustainable development and the rational use of human resources. It also aimed at demonstrating in practical ways that women's employment should contribute to the reduction of child labour and, working closely with representatives of Governments, employers, workers and other groups in civil society, sought to identify national strategies and plans of action in order to provide more and better jobs for women. The programme was of special importance in the context of globalization and the economic crisis, which affected many countries. Indeed, the ILO World Employment Report, 1998–1999 had pointed out that the number of unemployed around the world had never been higher and there was every indication that the number would continue to increase in the coming months. There was also reason to fear that women would be the principal victims of

that situation and would lose any gains made in the areas of equality and employment.

86. ILO had undertaken a study of prostitution in South-East Asia which had revealed that a growing number of women felt compelled to prostitute themselves for economic reasons. Given the crisis in that region and the increase in unemployment, more and more women would probably be driven into the sex trade sector, as would children forced to leave school because their parents were no longer able to pay for their education. Moreover, the drop in exchange rates caused by the crisis meant that an increase in sex tourism was to be expected. ILO was concerned that most countries did not have a clear policy regarding prostitution, nor any legislation to deal with that problem, especially adult prostitution. ILO had made recommendations in that area, stressing that it was important that measures should be taken not only to assist women and children who were compelled to prostitute themselves but also to deal with those who were responsible for their exploitation and who took advantage of it. Lastly, she indicated that, in addition to those programmes, ILO continued to support various activities aimed at mainstreaming gender concerns into all its policies and programmes, and had recently participated in meetings on the role of women in management and on their working conditions in export-processing zones.

Agenda item 101: Crime prevention and criminal justice *(continued)* (A/C.3/53/L.2, L.3, L.4, L.8 and L.9)

Introduction of draft resolutions

Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.8: United Nations African Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders

87. **Ms. Ukaeje** (Nigeria), introducing draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.8 on behalf of the Group of African States, said that the issue of crime prevention was particularly important to those countries and recalled, in that connection, paragraphs 29 and 30 of the Secretary-General's report on the United Nations African Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (A/53/381), which emphasized the detrimental effects of the increase in criminality in Africa and the urgent need for crime prevention strategies and better coordination among law enforcement agencies and the judiciary at the regional and subregional levels. Therefore, there would appear to be every justification to provide the Institute with the necessary resources to assist member States in need of bringing up to date their criminal justice policies and strengthening their criminal justice systems. Her delegation hoped that the Secretary-General's report would be welcomed and that the draft resolution would be adopted without a vote.

Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.9: Strengthening the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme, in particular its technical cooperation capacity

88. **Mr. Busacca** (Italy), introducing draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.9, announced that Australia, Cameroon, Croatia, France, Georgia, Greece, Guatemala, Israel, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Malta and Sweden had joined the list of sponsors. Recognizing the seriousness of the problem of crime throughout the world, the United Nations had established the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme for the primary purpose of encouraging cooperation and strengthening the national capacities of Member States to deal with that phenomenon. In collaboration with the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, the Centre for International Crime Prevention, despite its resource constraints, had played a leading role in elaborating a programme for the establishment of national standards and a framework for international action. The decision of Member States to make crime prevention one of the priorities of the medium-term plan for 1998–2001 bore witness to the importance they attached to that problem. The importance of the United Nations Congresses on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders and the Naples Political Declaration and Global Action Plan against Organized Transnational Crime should also be stressed. The Centre for International Crime Prevention must be provided with more resources so that it could fulfil its mandate. In fact, it seemed that programmes to combat crime had been among the most strongly affected by the Organization's financial difficulties. The draft resolution contained some new elements, particularly in paragraphs 5, 7, 8, 11, 13 and 15. Two minor revisions should be made: in paragraph 7, the words "the civil society organizations, including non-governmental organizations" should be replaced with the words "non-governmental organizations and other relevant sectors of civil society"; and in paragraph 13, the words "the main text of the Convention as well as of" should be inserted after the words "attention to the drafting of".

89. **Ms. Kaba Camara** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that her country wished to join the list of sponsors of the draft resolution.

Decisions on draft resolutions

Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.2: Preparations for the Tenth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders

90. **The Chairman** said that the draft resolution had no programme budget implications and that the Economic and Social Council had recommended its adoption.

91. *Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.2 was adopted.*

Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.3: Transnational organized crime

92. **The Chairman** said that the draft resolution, which the Economic and Social Council had recommended for adoption, had no programme budget implications. However, it did have implications for conference services. In that connection, he recalled the budgetary provisions for the biennium 1998–1999 described in annex II of the report of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, which indicated that provision had been made not only for meetings programmed at the time of budget preparation but also for meetings authorized subsequently, provided that the number and distribution of meetings were consistent with the pattern of meetings established in past years.

93. *Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.3 was adopted.*

Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.4: Mutual assistance and international cooperation in criminal matters

94. **The Chairman** said that the draft resolution had no programme budget implications and that the Economic and Social Council had recommended its adoption.

95. *Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.4 was adopted.*

Agenda item 102: International drug control *(continued)* (A/C.3/53/L.7)

Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.7: International cooperation against the world drug problem

96. **Mr. Albin** (Mexico), introducing draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.7, said that Bangladesh, Belgium, Cameroon, the Dominican Republic, Kyrgyzstan, Namibia and Zambia had joined the list of sponsors, bringing the total number of sponsors to 99.

97. The outcome of the twentieth special session of the General Assembly had been the result of negotiations and dialogue among Member States. Undoubtedly, the documents adopted would guide the actions taken to combat a phenomenon that knew no boundaries and posed a serious threat to societies, and particularly to young people.

98. The large number of countries sponsoring the draft resolution bore witness to the international community's spirit of cooperation and its desire to strengthen the relevant United Nations mechanism to improve its capacity to take action against the scourge of drugs.

99. The preamble of the draft resolution outlined various aspects of the world drug problem and the outcome of the special session, and the operative part was divided into four sections. The text reflected the consensus reached in June, and he hoped that it would be adopted by consensus.

100. **Ms. Kaba Camara** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that her country wished to join the list of sponsors of the draft resolution.

Agenda item 100: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family *(continued)* (A/C.3/53/L.6)

Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.6: The International Year of Older Persons, 1999

101. **The Chairman** said that the draft resolution had no programme budget implications. He recalled that Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Bolivia, China, Croatia, Denmark, Egypt, Guatemala, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Monaco, Norway, Pakistan, Paraguay, San Marino, South Africa, Sweden, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine, Uruguay and Venezuela had joined the list of sponsors when the draft had been introduced, and announced that Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Guinea, India, Israel, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nepal, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Sudan and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had also joined the list of sponsors.

102. **Ms. Aguiar** (Dominican Republic) announced that Cameroon, Malta, New Zealand, the Russian Federation, Thailand and the United States of America had joined the list of sponsors of the draft resolution.

103. *Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.6 was adopted.*

104. **The Chairman** said that the Committee had completed its consideration of agenda item 100.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.

United Nations A/C.3/53/SR.16

General Assembly
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Summary record of the 16th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 19 October 1998, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Hachani ..... (Tunisia)
later: Mr. Carranza (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Guatemala)

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* Items which the Committee has decided to consider together.

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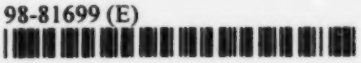

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda Item 103: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/53/38/Rev.1, A/53/72-S/1998/156, A/53/87, A/53/95-S/1998/311, A/53/167, 203, 318, 354, 363, 376, 409 and 447)

Agenda Item 104: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (*continued*) (A/53/72-S/1998/156, A/53/87, A/53/95-S/1998/311 and A/53/308)

1. **Mr. Rabuka** (Fiji) said that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action represented an acknowledgment by the international community that the advancement of women was a global problem requiring global effort. There were indications that actions by the international community were on the right track, as Governments had begun putting in place national programmes to implement their commitments under the Platform for Action. It was too early for complacency, however, since it was also clear that true gender equality was still far off. In the developing countries in particular, globalization had meant increased marginalization and exclusion, particularly among women.

2. His Government was fully aware that women's rights were not abstract aspirations and was striving to operationalize their rights to freedom from poverty, illness and violence in all forms. To that end, it had recently launched a Women's Plan of Action and had established a Department of Women and Culture. Among initiatives undertaken, that Department was in the process of establishing a database of women with the potential to participate at all levels of decision-making. The Women's Social and Economic Development Programme had been established to improve access by women to microcredit funds for income-generating projects. Since 1995, the Fiji Law Reform Commission had been at work reviewing laws which were disadvantageous to women. Nationwide literacy programmes would help to promote understanding of the gender aspects of relevant legislation. His Government was mindful of the important role played by non-governmental organizations and civil society in meeting Fiji's international obligations and had forged strong links with such bodies. As an example, the Fiji National Council of Women was the umbrella body for women's non-governmental organizations and had been closely involved in the preparation of the recently launched Women's Plan of Action.

3. His country faced constraints in financial and human resources in putting in place all the programmes it wished because of structural-adjustment directives from multilateral financial institutions requiring reduction in public spending or zero growth in public service. His delegation therefore called on the international community to extend a helping hand if it was genuinely interested in helping small-island developing States like Fiji to protect and advance the interests of women.

4. **Mr. Monagas** (Venezuela) said that despite the progress made in the priority areas defined by the Beijing Platform for Action, for millions of women in various regions of the world, justice and equality seemed to belong to another world. Poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, pregnancy-related deaths, the rise in women infected by the AIDS virus, violence and inequality in the workplace had reached unacceptable levels in a century which boasted of its great technological achievements. It had frequently been said that the cause of women was the cause of all humanity, but the time had come for specific mechanisms and structures in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres to eliminate gender inequality.

5. In Venezuela, gender equality was enshrined in the Constitution. In the area of violence against women, the National Council of Women had drafted a bill on violence against women and in the family which had recently been adopted by the Congress. An intensive promotional campaign in the mass media was being conducted to raise awareness of programmes on abuse of women.

6. Venezuela was working for the implementation of policies in favour of women. The combined efforts of the State and all segments of society to achieve social justice and improve the quality of life, particularly for women, became even more important as those goals drew nearer.

7. **Ms. Fritsche** (Liechtenstein) said that Liechtenstein's membership in international organizations had played a crucial role in bringing about domestic changes in the situation of women, both on a policy level and by raising awareness. The Fourth World Conference on Women had had a direct impact on the situation of women in Liechtenstein, and as an outcome of the Beijing Conference, it had acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, this contributing to the goal of universal ratification by the year 2000. The Convention was an important tool for the advancement of women, but its implementation was seriously hampered by the high number of reservations, which must be addressed as part of the campaign for its universal ratification. Her Government was of the view that the adoption of an optional protocol giving the Committee established under the Convention the competence to consider individual

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communications would give additional momentum to its work.

8. One of the areas of the Beijing Platform for Action of critical importance to her country was the issue of violence against women. Her Government had extended an invitation to the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on violence against women and it also welcomed the agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women on the issue of women in armed conflict.

9. The adoption of the Statute of an International Criminal Court had been an important development in that regard. In adopting that Statute, the international community had recognized that rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, and forced sterilization or other forms of sexual violence constituted crimes against humanity and war crimes. Her delegation hoped that a number of women judges would be nominated by their Governments and elected to the Court. It also attached particular importance to the increasingly important role of women in preventive diplomacy, post-conflict peace-building and peacekeeping.

10. The overall situation of women in the Secretariat remained a concern, especially their representation at higher levels. While the personal commitment of the Secretary-General was welcome, special measures would be needed if the goal of 50/50 gender distribution by the year 2000 was to be met. In conclusion, her delegation agreed with the statement of the European Union that the causes rather than the symptoms and consequences of women's inequality needed to be addressed, which included the roles and attitudes of men.

11. **Ms. Weasley** (Australia) said that, in the fiftieth anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it must be acknowledged that although much had been achieved to advance the status of women internationally, for many millions of women those aspirations had not yet been realized. Discrimination and violence persisted, embedded in cultures around the world so deeply that many women considered it a normal part of life. The high-level review planned for 2000 would be an opportunity to develop strategies for overcoming the continuing barriers to the full implementation of international instruments in that area.

12. Australia had implemented wide-ranging reforms to advance the status of women and had put in place a robust framework of anti-discrimination legislation. Actions violating the human rights of women were prohibited by law and all forms of physical and sexual violence against women had been criminalized. Of particular note was the national campaign to eliminate domestic violence. Australian society was made up of people from all parts of the world who brought with them many traditional, religious or cultural practices. It welcomed the diversity of its society, but practices that constituted violence against women could not be overlooked or justified on the grounds of traditional culture. In view of the concern that women and girls migrating from some parts of the world might be at risk from female genital mutilation after settling in Australia, federal and state governments had adopted a prevention strategy involving both legislation and community-education initiatives.

13. A major factor in women's enjoyment of fundamental rights was their ability to participate fully in political and economic life. Although women were still under-represented in politics, the Government had recently appointed a number of women to senior positions.

14. The gap between specialized women's machinery and general, or mainstream, human rights mechanisms must be bridged. Human rights treaty monitoring bodies and special procedure mechanisms, such as special rapporteurs, must give increasing attention to the gender dimension of their work. An effective partnership between the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Human Rights was vital. In that connection, her delegation welcomed the presence of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights at the most recent session of the Commission on the Status of Women and such initiatives as the basic information kit called "Women's rights: the Responsibility of All". The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights had a key role to play in providing gender-disaggregated data on human rights monitoring, identifying gender-specific violations and providing gender training for human rights monitors in the field.

15. Her delegation looked forward to the next meeting of the open-ended Working Group on the Elaboration of a Draft Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to be held in parallel with the forty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women. It also welcomed the Secretary-General's renewed commitment to achieving gender equality in the Secretariat, given the unacceptably low level of representation of women at the D-1 level and above, and the new strategies being adopted to achieve the 50/50 goal. Managerial commitment and accountability were vital to improving the gender balance in the United Nations. Her delegation had urged the Secretary-General to consider qualified women candidates for the post of special representative and was pleased that he had done so in a number of cases during the past year. Her delegation

encouraged him to continue along that path and also urged Member States to nominate competent women candidates for his consideration.

16. **Ms. Ahmed** (Sudan) said that Sudanese women played an effective role in the life of her country and were accorded equal rights and responsibilities pursuant to the Constitution adopted by popular referendum in 1998. Women occupied high-level political and judicial positions and were constitutionally guaranteed a minimum of 25 per cent of the membership of Parliament and 10 per cent of that of popular committees. Women currently represented about 9 per cent of the National Assembly, and 24 per cent of state councils. Foremost amongst the legislation that had been passed with regard to equality in employment were the law of public service and the 1997 labour law. All the legislation adopted had complied with international and regional conventions. Sudanese women also played an important role in the national economy, representing over one quarter of the labour force mostly in the agricultural sector.

17. The Sudan had been one of the first countries to respond to the recommendations of international conferences on the advancement of women, and had established numerous official, popular and voluntary mechanisms to support women's activities. For example, the unit for women's advancement had been established in 1975 in the Ministry of Social Welfare. In 1993 a women's department had been established in the Ministry of Social Planning and was responsible for developing overall women's policies in coordination with the women's units in other ministries and the administrative districts, and for defining the general goals for the advancement of women and the family. A number of non-governmental organizations in the country were involved in women's development, largely with a view to reducing illiteracy and alleviating poverty.

18. Despite the many gains made by Sudanese women, the implementation of women's programmes was often difficult, owing to the low level of foreign technical assistance and to lack of infrastructure in the regions affected by war in the south of the country. Some three million people, mostly women and children, had been displaced as a result of that war. The Government was making enormous efforts to bring peace to the country and enable all citizens, men and women, to contribute to development. The question of women must be dealt with by each society in accordance with its cultural and traditional particularities, but her delegation believed that the results of the Fourth World Conference on Women represented the first step towards the empowerment of women in all sectors of society.

19. *Mr. Carranza (Guatemala), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

20. **Mrs. Ghimire** (Nepal) said that the relationship between the advancement of women and economic performance was an acknowledged fact. Over the previous 50 years, the United Nations had played an important role in securing the legal foundations of equality, recognizing the role of women in development and remaining open to ideas emanating from non-governmental organizations and civil society.

21. In many countries there was still a vast gap between women's rights at the legislative and policy levels, and the actual status of women. Major world conferences had not only drawn the attention of the global community to gender bias, but had also brought the global networking on gender parity into sharper focus.

22. Her delegation welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/53/308). All forms of violence against women were of deep concern. As a party to the Convention, Nepal called for measures to end such discrimination and acts of violence.

23. As in the case of many developing countries, Nepal had a low rate of literacy and women formed a large segment of the total illiterate population. Her Government had recently established a separate Ministry of Women and Social Welfare dedicated to issues relating to women. Special measures had also been taken to encourage the involvement of women in development through the adoption of basic policies on general- and technical-education programmes, and the compulsory appointment of female teachers. Activities relating to safe motherhood, immunization, family-planning services and population education were also in progress.

24. Further measures had been taken for the induction of women into the political and administrative spheres, in full recognition of their participation in the popular movement for the restoration of multi-party democracy. An electoral provision had been made for 20 per cent of seats in the village development committees to be earmarked for women and that provision had greatly enhanced women's mobilization. Nearly 40,000 women had been elected in the primary level of the political hierarchy.

25. It was disheartening to note that, despite the continued efforts of the United Nations, women represented the largest socially excluded group. Women bore a disproportionate share of suffering emanating from social disintegration, unemployment, environmental degradation and war. It was

only through the sharing of power, resources and responsibilities that an effective contribution could be made to bridging the gender disparity. Nepal fully supported the efforts of the United Nations system in raising concern over traditional practices affecting women, the trafficking in women and girls, and gender discrimination, which were adversely affecting the dignity, honour and rights of women. There was urgent need for a broader vision of a new world order characterized by equal opportunities and rights between women and men. That vision must inspire the work of the international community in the coming century.

26. Her delegation encouraged the Secretary-General to continue his concern regarding the need for publicity, advocacy and outreach efforts to promote awareness of gender issues and the need to achieve equality. Nepal firmly believed that there should be full parity in the representation of women in education, government, business and international organizations.

27. **Ms. Eshmambetova** (Kyrgyzstan) said that, although two years remained before the high-level review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a gender approach would require greater concerted action and coordination among Governments, international and non-governmental organizations to improve the status of women.

28. In Kyrgyzstan, the National Plan of Action reflected almost all 12 problem areas in the Beijing Platform and also listed country-specific needs and priorities. Mechanisms such as the National Commission on the Status of Women and the women's initiatives centres located in all six regions of the Republic had played the largest role in developing the programme. Over 100 women's organizations had also taken part in its implementation, with international support. With the help of its partners, two women's crisis centres had been opened in Bishkek to provide legal, psychological and medical assistance to women. Women's access to land and credit was a major problem, since women made up the majority of the agricultural sector. Providing them with microcredit helped them not only to survive under difficult economic conditions but gave them a more active role in the country's social and political life.

29. Many international organizations and donor countries had provided assistance in that area, including the World Bank and UNDP, which had opened a Women in Development office. UNIFEM had begun its activities in the country with a project concerning violence against women. However, despite those successes, women in Kyrgyzstan had not yet achieved the desired progress. Improving the status of women must be considered as a basic component of a successful, just and democratic society.

30. **Ms. Leeran** (Israel) said that the establishment of the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, under the auspices of the Prime Minister's Office, was but one example of the significant progress achieved in Israel in the areas outlined by the Fourth World Conference on Women. The Authority had been established under the Law for the Advancement of the Status of Women, adopted in 1998, which promoted equality of the sexes and ensured coordination among bodies relating to the status of women through education, legislation and law enforcement. It also promoted activities for the prevention of violence against women.

31. The Authority would foster the advancement of women and equality between the sexes and would combat discrimination and violence. It had already launched a programme on gender equality and the prevention of domestic violence, particularly against women, through education and it organized lectures and workshops on the prevention of violence for recruits of the Israeli Defence Forces and government employees. It was also attempting to build awareness, particularly among Arab women, new immigrants and ultra-orthodox Jewish women, on the importance of periodical medical screening. The Authority had promoted a law on sexual harassment in the workplace, which had entered into force in 1998; it sponsored professional training programmes for women in the fields of computers and communications, particularly for Arab women, new immigrants and ultra-orthodox Jewish women; and encouraged unemployed single mothers to seek work in order to support their families. It planned to encourage business and career women to foster equal pay for women and the appointment of women to high-level positions.

32. The progress achieved with regard to the advancement of women was the result of the unremitting efforts of Israeli women's rights organizations and non-governmental organizations, which had long been active in promoting women's rights even before the establishment of the State of Israel. Thanks to their efforts, Israel had an extensive infrastructure of child care centres, neighbourhood infant health clinics, professional training courses, legal aid offices and family health assistance programmes for young women and adults.

33. **Mr. Ngay** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that his country was one of the few which, due to its geostrategic situation, and vast human and natural resources, had endured a history of suffering and scandalous violations of the human rights of its people. As he spoke, the people

of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly women and children living in the regions occupied by invading soldiers were victims of large-scale violations of the basic rules of international law, including rape, extermination, deportation and other heinous crimes. The Congolese women had been constantly exposed to the risks of contagion by the HIV/AIDS virus and unwanted pregnancies. The Vatican had spoken out in condemnation of the escalation of atrocities, particularly after the massacre of dozens of religious leaders and innocent parishioners in August 1998.

34. In the midst of silence on the part of the international community, a Ugandan journalist had confirmed the abhorrent acts of violence committed against women by the occupying Ugandan army in the town of Kisangani. The women of the Democratic Republic of the Congo were left defenseless and seemingly alone in their sufferings. He wondered whether the silence should be interpreted as complicity or indifference.

35. The aggression against his country had begun in August 1998, just as the Government had been laying a foundation for a democratic way of life and the restoration of respect and dignity to all Congolese people. The Government had launched a triennial plan of national reconstruction encompassing gender-specific dimensions in all areas, and the National Bureau of Action and Social Advancement had already begun to play an exemplary role in placing woman at the forefront of key national sectors. The time in which a woman's role was limited to housekeeping had passed. Women in Africa were, first and foremost, teachers and counsellors and were actively engaged in asserting their rights. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, all legal instruments reinforced the new role of African women. A 1987 Act on the Family Code had been amended to replace the concept of marital authority with parental authority. Violations of those rules were viewed as offences, as were all customs based on the inequality of the sexes and practices which endangered the health and dignity of women. Special legal mechanisms for the protection of women had also been introduced in the area of employment and education. Furthermore, the Constitution, which was under review, would include explicit guarantees of parity between the sexes.

36. His delegation welcomed the efforts of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to ensure respect for and application of the Convention. The Democratic Republic of the Congo was also pleased that the efforts made to promote ratification of the Convention. He commended the work of the pre-sessional Working Group in obtaining information on the status of women in specific countries and urged application of that practice to all Member States. His delegation appreciated the Secretary-General's report on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/53/376) and he noted the progress made in achieving the goal of gender equality within the Secretariat.

37. He appealed to the solidarity of all women to heed the distress signals of Congolese women living in the occupied regions, and thereby make an effective contribution to the advancement of women, which was indispensable for world peace.

38. **Mr. Mapuranga** (Zimbabwe) said that social, economic and political issues must incorporate women's concerns in their core in order to ensure that women enjoyed equality as partners and occupied their rightful place as decision makers. The participation of women in programme evaluation would bring fresh ideas and innovative solutions to the problems facing the world. The acknowledgement of injustice and the need for changes to discriminatory cultural patterns, laws and norms of behaviour were positive developments.

39. Some progress had been made in the economic empowerment, education and training, of Zimbabwean women, and in their participation in political life. The Ministry of National Affairs, Employment Creation and Cooperatives, with UNDP assistance, had embarked on a project on Women in Politics and Decision-Making aimed at encouraging women to stand as candidates in elections. On the economic front, a women's bank had been established to offer banking and credit access to marginalized groups. It also provided for the possibility for them to own the majority of the bank's shares. Zimbabwe was working to strengthen national machinery through gender focal points in ministries. Action plans to facilitate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and gender mainstreaming were under way.

40. With respect to the justice system, statutes had been identified with a view to their being amended in order to ensure their compatibility with the Convention. They included the Communal Land Act and the Guardianship of Minors Act. The Convention had been translated into two major vernacular languages, Shona and Ndebele, and a booklet identified gaps and areas of overlap in the legal-rights field and proposed methods for disseminating information to the targeted groups.

41. At the regional level, Zimbabwe had been involved in the formulation of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) plan of action for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. National commitment to

the ideals of equality and respect for human rights was unwavering. However, regional efforts were hampered by a scarcity of resources. His Government was convinced that the recent appointment of two gender officers to the SADC Secretariat would generate renewed interest on the part of donors to assist SADC with the tools it needed to ensure gender mainstreaming.

42. There was indeed complementarity between the efforts of SADC and those of other concerned entities. His Government was encouraged by the momentum of debates within that forum, and remained fully committed in its resolve to bring justice to all. The major concern was that legislation-enforcement mechanisms should go in tandem with expectations. Zimbabwe would continue to work assiduously to ensure the mainstreaming of gender, to facilitate the training of women and girls, and to remove any discriminatory laws that continued to hamper women's progress. Perpetrators of violence against women would be convicted in courts that would treat women as equal to men.

43. Furthermore, cumbersome legal and bureaucratic procedures should not hamper the fight against HIV/AIDS. Special appreciation was due to such organizations as UNICEF, WHO and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) for work done in the region in general, and Zimbabwe in particular.

44. **Ms. Leonce** (Saint Lucia), speaking on behalf of the 14 States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that, as there was now a heightened awareness and discussion of women's issues worldwide, the Committee's focus should rather be on implementation of the many agreements on women's rights. Of particular importance were the rights of women to employment and to equal participation in development, because they determined the quality of women's lives and also those of humanity in general. Also, in the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights it was appropriate to assert those rights for women: denial of them resulted in a large sector of a society remaining underproductive. It was therefore in the best interests of societies and of the world as a whole to assist women in achieving their full potential, not least because women nurtured the future of humanity and the longest-lasting influence on a person's life was that person's mother.

45. CARICOM believed that women must be included in all action plans and strategies of Governments, and of other institutions, if there was to be progress in world economic and social development and if all people were to enjoy their rights.

46. Given that advocacy and awareness had already taken root, CARICOM would continue to encourage Governments to introduce strategies to implement the outcome of global conferences, specifically that of the Fourth World Conference on Women, and to establish or strengthen government mechanisms to implement national strategies and policies.

47. CARICOM was encouraged by the progress made by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in reviewing the country reports and by the large number of States that had ratified the Convention. However, the preparation of national plans did not show the same level of progress. CARICOM believed that the situation was serious, and called for greater efforts to assist countries in preparing their national plans and reports.

48. Also, CARICOM member States were concerned that, as reported by the Secretary-General, few country plans established comprehensive, time-bound targets with benchmarks and indicators for monitoring, and most failed to indicate sources of financing. CARICOM believed it was important that Governments should allocate resources so that national plans could be implemented. Also, monitoring and measuring were needed if the special session of the General Assembly in 2000 was to review the implementation of the follow-up to the Beijing Conference.

49. She applauded the efforts of the United Nations system to mainstream a gender perspective in programmes and for the many innovative methods and programmes detailed in the Secretary-General's report (A/53/376).

50. CARICOM was concerned by the increasing levels of poverty among women arising from globalization and trade liberalization, and welcomed the work done by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in identifying opportunities for and threats to sustainable livelihoods for women. It hoped also that studies on the impact of trade liberalization in its region would continue and be expanded, and looked forward to the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council in 1999 devoted to the role of employment in poverty eradication and the empowerment of women.

51. The challenge of getting the Governments of the Caribbean Community to take gender into account in their national planning was ongoing, and CARICOM therefore appreciated the assistance from UNIFEM and the Commonwealth Secretariat in a mission to explore the feasibility of establishing a gender-management system in the public sector in Saint Kitts and Nevis and in Antigua and Barbuda. CARICOM looked forward to the establishment of similar management systems throughout the region.

52. There had been no significant progress in curbing violence against women, despite increased awareness of the issue; CARICOM hoped that the activities associated with the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights would help in that connection, and welcomed the efforts of UNIFEM in the Latin America and Caribbean Region in launching an inter-agency regional awareness campaign on freedom from violence.

53. CARICOM believed that the addition of gender advisers to the system of resident coordinators was a significant achievement, and hoped that they would be rotated to all regions and countries to strengthen support for national-level implementation of the Platform throughout the world.

54. She reiterated that there could be no implementation without resources and conveyed an appeal by CARICOM to the international community for assistance in translating national plans into action through the involvement of women in government decision-making and through provision of proper health, education, employment opportunities and a conducive environment for women to develop their full potential. Then there would be real economic and social progress, not only for women but for the world, and CARICOM reaffirmed its commitment to doing its part in achieving that goal.

55. **Ms. Majali** (Jordan) said that Jordan was encouraged by the progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in activities by United Nations bodies and also at the national level. Jordan viewed the Declaration and Platform for Action as guidelines for its own national strategy for women's advancement. The National Committee for Women had been entrusted with drawing up policies and identifying priorities for Jordanian women, and had achieved much. In 1996 it had been invested with important responsibilities for coordinating efforts with ministries, public and private institutions and non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, legislation deemed to contain discriminatory clauses had been or was being brought into line with the Constitution and Jordan's commitments under the Convention.

56. Jordan firmly believed that women should be empowered in terms of decision-making and political participation; the Constitution granted men and women equal rights and opportunities to participate in all spheres of social, economic and political life. Indeed, a survey had shown that the barriers were not legislative but attributable rather to social stereotyping and psychological mind-sets about what women viewed as their proper roles. Numerous workshops, seminars and training programmes for local officials and for women from all walks of life fostered a new understanding of women's roles in society and of their political and legal rights and encouraged them to participate in public life.

57. Jordan applauded the outcome of the 1998 session of the Economic and Social Council and the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and supported gender mainstreaming in all United Nations system policies and programmes; indeed, it believed that a gender perspective in reviewing the implementation and follow-up of United Nations conferences was imperative in any approach to tackle the feminization of poverty. Jordan also supported the Secretary-General's efforts to achieve a gender balance at all levels by the year 2000 but stressed that equitable geographical representation must be taken into account.

58. Upon the endorsement of the national economic and social plan for the years 1998 to 2002, all departments of the Jordanian Government had mainstreamed the gender perspective in policy and programme formulation as part of its holistic approach to planning, with the involvement of the National Committee. In education, new topics dealing with women's and children's health care and the promotion of gender equality had been brought into school curricula, and despite a high birth rate, major improvements had been reported in maternal health and infant mortality through better access to health centres and family planning and as a result of awareness campaigns and publications and the child-survival programme.

59. Although there had been a significant increase in the number of women in the work force, it was still low: women were mostly employed in health and education. Indeed, 59 per cent of teachers were women. Economic and social obstacles still impeded full economic participation by women, especially among the poor, because of traditions, limited resources, difficulty in obtaining loans and a lack of skills. In response, special programmes sponsored by non-governmental organizations and the relevant ministries had been established to create small income-generating projects and provide training; however, the projects needed continuous financial assistance.

60. Jordan believed that violence against women was unacceptable and that legal and social measures should be taken against those who perpetrated it: such violence was punishable as a crime. However, for social reasons many incidents went unreported by women. A number of measures had been taken to tackle that problem: the media had become more effective in highlighting it and special family centres had been established in both the Ministry of the Interior and the Directorate of Civil Security to pursue such cases and provide victims with legal and medical assistance.

61. Jordan condemned also all forms of violence against women in armed conflicts and was signatory to the Statute of the International Criminal Court: Jordan considered such crimes, including rape and enforced pregnancy, as crimes against humanity.

62. Jordan was following with interest the progress in drafting the optional protocol to the Convention on the right to petition. It believed, however, that the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties of 1969 did not accord human-rights treaties special status in respect of immunity from reservations.

63. She noted that Miyasser Al-Saadi, a Jordanian woman, had in recent days been honoured by UNDP for her efforts against poverty. Ms. Al-Saadi had wondered aloud in her address if she had given enough of herself; those simple and courageous words reflected women's real potential to give, to lead and to participate as equal partners.

64. **Mrs. Van Lith** (World Health Organization (WHO)) commended the Division for the Advancement of Women for its work in monitoring progress in the area of traditional practices affecting the health of women and children, as reflected in the Secretary-General's report (A/53/354). WHO considered female genital mutilation a form of violence against girls and women that had serious consequences for their physical, psychosocial and sexual health and was committed to the elimination of such practices; it therefore welcomed General Assembly resolution 52/99. WHO affirmed that the human rights of girls and women, including their rights to bodily integrity and to the highest attainable standard of physical, mental and social well-being, must be protected and promoted.

65. WHO condemned the medicalization of female genital mutilation, namely the involvement of health professionals in female genital mutilation in any setting, including hospitals. It had recently convened a technical consultation with nurses, midwives and obstetricians from areas where female genital mutilation was prevalent and, as a follow-up to the recommendations emanating from that exercise, was developing training materials, including guidelines for health-care providers, in order to prevent female genital mutilation, and for managing the health complications that resulted from it. The training materials would be integrated into nursing, midwifery and medical curricula.

66. To deal with harmful traditional practices and female genital mutilation, it was necessary to educate the public, health workers and practitioners of mutilation; that called for the involvement not only of professionals, development workers, local communities and their leaders, and women's groups and organizations, but also of political leaders.

67. In March 1997, the WHO Regional Office for Africa had launched a regional plan of action to accelerate the elimination of female genital mutilation in Africa; it had been launched simultaneously in many African countries and had set short-, medium- and long-term goals to be reached by countries in the region. WHO was also providing technical support for countries to develop national policies and plans. In April 1997 WHO, together with UNICEF and UNFPA had issued a joint statement against female genital mutilation, expressing the three organizations' common purpose of supporting the efforts of Governments and communities to promote and protect the health and development of women and children.

68. The reasons for the slow progress in eliminating female genital mutilation included lack of coordination between prevention programmes and limited investment of resources in them. WHO expected that a well-designed and well-coordinated campaign that had appropriate technical expertise and adequate funding would bring about a major decline in female genital mutilation in 10 years and its elimination within three generations.

69. WHO currently could only estimate the prevalence of female genital mutilation: there were major gaps in the understanding of the extent of the problem, the incidence of health complications and the kinds of intervention that could eliminate the practice. WHO was focusing on increasing knowledge through a research and development programme and on promoting technically sound policies and approaches.

70. WHO had identified six countries in Africa for intensified technical support over the next three years; the project would involve reviewing what was already known about female genital mutilation and supplementing that with research to develop best practices for eliminating it. A systematic review of research on the health complications had already been completed, as had collation of primary data on the socioeconomic and cultural aspect of female genital mutilation, while a review of programming approaches to prevention in various countries would be completed by the end of 1998. WHO would coordinate its work with its United Nations partners and with non-governmental agencies in the various countries.

71. She reported that Dr. Brundtland, the new Director-General of WHO, had said that WHO would reach out to others in the United Nations family to unite their resources and knowledge, work more closely with countries and engage the private sector; they would forge new working relationships so that together they could make a difference to the health of all peoples.

72. **Mr. Gubarevich** (Belarus) said that, even on the threshold of the twenty-first century, in no society did women have the same opportunities as men: gender inequality was so ingrained in people's mentalities that they were often not fully aware of it and accepted it as the natural order, as reflected in practically all forms of State governance. The standard achieved in the mid-twentieth century of equal pay for equal work, equal rights to education and so on, in which so much hope had been invested, had proved insufficient to improve the situation radically.

73. However, much hope was now being invested in the fact that gender equality had recently become the focus of attention from the international community, and the Fourth World Conference on Women had been a landmark in action to that end. The most important problems had been identified, strategic goals had been set and so had temporary frameworks for achieving them. Now the most difficult stage – the practical work – had arrived.

74. The final documents of the Beijing Conference had become fundamental for Belarus: it was basing on them its actions to improve women's status in all areas of life and to enhance their social protection. Belarus had had one of the first national plans of action to improve the status of women (1996–2000) and had submitted it well in advance of the timetable set under the relevant General Assembly resolution. The Government had adopted a comprehensive approach in its "Women of Belarus" programme of 1996; also, in 1997, Belarus had adopted a national sustainable development strategy whereby one of the principal goals was to define a clear-cut State policy on gender equality, improve the representation of women and strengthen their role in the central and local authorities. The Government, while supporting the structures of civil society, was taking specific legislative and practical measures to meet the goals set at Beijing.

75. International cooperation under United Nations auspices had an important role to play in improving the status of women. Support was urgently needed for countries with economies in transition, where socio-economic changes were exacerbated by the current global financial and economic upheavals. The political basis for providing such support was the Beijing Platform for Action, which directly appealed to the United Nations system and also to IMF and the World Bank to assist countries with economies in transition in developing and implementing measures to improve the status of women.

76. Significant assistance was being provided to Belarus by UNDP. The joint project between the Belarus Government and UNDP on women in development had provided significant support for a whole range of national measures.

77. He welcomed the decision by the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board to extend the mandate of UNIFEM to Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. UNIFEM had started practical activities in the region by establishing business contacts, defining priority areas for cooperation and including the region in its current programmes. The Government of Belarus gave high ratings to the Fund's two missions to Belarus and to its support for the national programme on gender-disaggregated statistics. Belarus also supported the project, currently in preparation, that would form a framework for the Fund's work in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, and hoped that donors would provide more active assistance for the Fund's activities in the region.

78. His delegation wholeheartedly supported the decision to hold a special session of the General Assembly in 2000 to review progress since the adoption of the Beijing Platform. The special session would provide another stimulus to the efforts of States, Governments and the world community towards improving the status of women. It also welcomed the decision to make the Commission on the Status of Women the preparatory committee for the special session in the belief that the preparatory work, in which Belarus intended to participate, would be most effectively carried out that way and because duplication of effort would thus be avoided.

79. **Ms. Ukaese** (Nigeria) expressed her delegation's full support for the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Of particular interest to Nigeria was the report of the Secretary-General on traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women (A/53/354), an issue which continued to challenge the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. She hoped that it would be given serious consideration by the General Assembly.

80. The Beijing Platform for Action had been followed up in Nigeria by the launching of the Family Support Programme and Family Economic Advancement Programme and by the establishment of the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development and state Ministries of Women's Affairs. Together with non-governmental organizations, those institutions were delivering assistance to rural and urban women and organizing workshops on the implementation of the Beijing Platform. The Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development had published simple manuals and workbooks

on the 12 critical areas of the Platform for Action with a view to changing discriminatory attitudes in Nigeria.

81. Nigeria had ratified the Convention in 1985 without reservations and had recently submitted its combined second and third periodic reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. It had taken note of the Committee's concluding comments, particularly concerning the lack of adequate data in its reporting processes. The Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development would attempt to improve the statistical content of Nigeria's fourth periodic report.

82. Nigeria had submitted its national action plan to the Division for the Advancement of Women. National gender-mainstreaming activities included a series of workshops organized by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development in cooperation with, *inter alia*, UNDP, UNIFEM and UNICEF. UNDP had been coordinating the activities of the inter-agency forum, a collaborative donor effort in support of the advancement of Nigerian women.

83. Her delegation welcomed the launching of the inter-agency regional campaign to eliminate violence against women and girls in Africa, which would culminate in 16 days of activism in protest of violence from 24 November to 10 December, coinciding with the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It appreciated the efforts of UNIFEM, UNICEF and UNFPA in that connection.

84. **Ms. Ramírez** (Costa Rica) expressed her delegation's interest in the report of the Secretary-General on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/53/376). She noted the goal of 50/50 gender distribution within the Secretariat by the year 2000 in all categories of posts and hoped that the principle of equitable geographical distribution would indeed be respected.

85. As part of the follow-up to the Beijing Conference, Costa Rica was incorporating a number of special laws in its legal system with the aim of eliminating discrimination. That legislation pertained to domestic violence, assistance to impoverished women and the establishment of the National Women's Institute and the Ministry on the Status of Women. The electoral code had been reformed to ensure that 40 per cent of popularly elected posts in the district, cantonal and provincial assemblies were occupied by women. Convinced of the need to ensure that women controlled their own development, Costa Rica was establishing credit policies favourable to women, particularly female heads-of-household in rural areas.

86. **Ms. Ostrauskaite** (Lithuania) said that her delegation supported the statement delivered by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union. The Lithuanian Women's Advancement Programme had been developed jointly by her Government and non-governmental organizations to follow up the Beijing Platform for Action. It covered 10 critical areas, including the protection of women's human rights, women's economic and social status, women and education and women and decision-making. Her Government had also proposed a bill on equal opportunities which was under consideration by the Parliament. The bill provided for the creation of an ombudsman for equal opportunities and labour inspectors in order to ensure gender equality. Lithuania was also working hard to harmonize its employment laws with those of six directives of the European Union, with which it was associated. The Lithuanian Women's Advancement Programme was monitored by both parliamentary and governmental mechanisms for the enforcement of equal rights and opportunities. Not only had Lithuanian women's organizations worked to ensure the integration of a gender perspective in government policies but they had also established a Crisis Centre and counselling services for victims of domestic violence in a joint Lithuania-Norwegian project and, at the local level, shelters for abused women in collaboration with non-governmental organizations.

87. Her delegation welcomed the activities of the Consultative Group for the International Year of Older Persons and supported the proposal by the Commission for Social Development to explore the feasibility of an ageing-related development index for inclusion in the *Human Development Report*. It was deeply concerned that Lithuanian women, who outlived men by an average of 11 years, often had scarce resources and suffered the health problems associated with old age. Her Government had established an advisory group on older persons which would make gender-specific recommendations concerning the status of older women. Her delegation supported gender-mainstreaming activities under the aegis of the Economic and Social Council and looked forward to the fifty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

88. **Ms. Faetanini** (San Marino) said that, in her country, women's representation at the ministerial and sub-ministerial levels was slightly over 21 per cent, or double the world average; at the sub-ministerial level, the critical mass of 30 per cent had been attained. Moreover, in the past two decades, a number of women had occupied the most prestigious post of Captain Regent of the Republic.

89. She expressed deep concern that violence against women and girls remained the most widespread violation of

universal human rights. The trend in which the civilian population, particularly women, accounted for 90 per cent of the casualties in armed conflict was equally disturbing. In that connection her delegation supported the Statute of the International Criminal Court in Rome, adopted in June, which characterized rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution and other forms of sexual violence as war crimes.

90. Her delegation welcomed the Committee's consideration of a consensus-based resolution sponsored by the Netherlands, condemning female genital mutilation as a form of violence against women. Criminalization of that practice, however, would only force it underground – which could be damaging, if not fatal, to women – or stigmatize women who rejected it. Her delegation supported the alternative practices outlined in the report of the Secretary-General (A/53/354), including "circumcision through words", that focused on the symbolic meaning of that rite of passage but eliminated the harmful physical aspect. In conclusion, she noted that the central theme of World Food Day, "Women feed the world", attested to women's responsibility for the survival of the human species.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.